Animation International

International Institute for Animation Arts

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Contents

Inaugural Message

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Throughout the vast expanse of human history, the intertwining, collision, and evolution of art and technology have never ceased. Each significant integration has been accompanied by a great leap forward in civilization. From the ancient cave paintings to the grandeur of Greek theaters, the rise of films and television, and now the emergence of animation technologies and artificial intelligence, art and technology together weave humanity's dreams and explorations of endless possibilities for the future.

In this unprecedented era of pursuing multidimensional expression and immersive experiences, we deeply recognize the importance and mission of establishing an international publication that encompasses the cutting-edge fields of animation, theater and film, and artificial intelligence. Today, with great anticipation, we proudly introduce to the global audience Animation International. This international journal focuses on the intersection of animation art, theatrical and film creation, and AI technology, aiming to break down disciplinary boundaries, gather global expertise, and lead frontier exploration.

Over the past decades, animation art, with its unique audiovisual language, has not only gained widespread popularity but has profoundly influenced the global cultural industry. Theater and film, with their compelling narratives and emotional expressions, continue to shape the human spiritual world. Artificial intelligence, advancing at an unstoppable pace, has penetrated every field, revolutionizing our understanding of creativity and art production. Now, the convergence of these three fields has become the most forefront area of exploration in the global cultural and creative landscape.

We established Animation International to witness and document how this convergence is profoundly transforming humanity's forms of expression and methods of communication, driving the birth and maturity of new artistic forms with unprecedented vigor. As a systematic international journal dedicated to animation creation, theater and film, and the fusion of AI, Animation International carries the mission of recording and analyzing the latest developments in these fields. It also strives to provide a platform for global creative elites to exchange ideas and inspire new creative inspirations and technological innovations.

The goals of Animation International are clear and forward-looking: First, we aim to focus on the world's most advanced animation creation techniques and theoretical research, deeply exploring how new technologies drive innovative expressions in animation art. Second, we examine the creative patterns and narrative techniques in theatrical and film works, particularly how AI technology empowers the traditional theater and film industries to explore new expressive spaces and creative models. Third, we delve into how artificial intelligence deeply integrates with artistic creation, analyzing the ethical challenges and future directions of AI in animation and film production.

To achieve this, Animation International will widely invite leading experts and scholars from the global animation, theater and film, and artificial intelligence fields to engage in in-depth interdisciplinary dialogues and collaborations. The publication will feature various sections such as special discussions, in-depth interviews, academic research, and analyses of frontier technologies, ensuring that our content is both comprehensive and rigorous, balancing academic depth with industry practice.

In the inaugural issue, we have specially invited internationally renowned animation directors,

Lijun Sun, Professor and former Vice-President of Beijing Film Academy, China.

theater and film creators, and AI scientists to discuss the new trends in animation narratives, new possibilities in scriptwriting, and the creative revolution brought by AI technology. This rich and insightful content will help readers better understand how art and technology mutually inspire and drive the vibrant development of future culture.

We are well aware that practitioners and researchers in animation, theater and film, and AI fields urgently need a professional, high-caliber international platform for idea exchange, debate, and experience sharing. Animation International is born to meet this demand. Upholding a broad vision, rigorous academic spirit, and continuous innovation, we aim to present global readers with a top-tier publication that combines intellectual depth with industry influence.
We sincerely hope that whether you are a researcher of animation art, a theater and film creator, or an explorer of AI technology, you can find your stage in Animation International and resonate with the most creative minds worldwide.

Here, we cordially invite experts, scholars, creators, and pioneers from around the world to join us in exploring the limitless possibilities brought about by the convergence of animation, theater and film, and artificial intelligence, and to move toward an even brighter and more intelligent future hand in hand.

Let us eagerly await and witness the exciting beginning of a new era of art and technology led by Animation International.

Analysis of the Resurgence of Classic International Animated Films in the Context of Contemporary Cultural Dissemination —Using *Castle in the Sky* as an Example

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Abstract

The re-screening of classic international animated films has increasingly become a prominent aspect of popular cultural life in the post-pandemic era, showcasing enduring themes and aesthetic values. To a certain extent, it reflects the cultural psychological needs of contemporary citizens in terms of collectiveness, sociality, and the characteristics of the times.This article aims to take Hayao Miyazaki's Castle in the Sky re-release in mainland China as an example. Firstly, it analyzes the "nostalgia-driven" psychological mechanism behind the phenomenon of re-screening from a psychoanalytic perspective. Then, it focuses on the content of the work, examining four dimensions—narrative text, artistic style, promotional strategies, and derivative collaborations—to explore how the re-screening of classic international animated films resonates with the collective memory of Chinese audiences and stimulates their cognitive and emotional identification.

Keywords: Castle in the Sky, re-screening, imported film, animated movie

Re-released films, also known as revival films, refer to the process of reproducing and re-consuming past historical audiovisual texts[1]. Beyond the direct re-release of the original film, there are also re-releases that enhance the audio-visual quality through restoration technology, as well as re-releases that supplement or revise the original narrative content. In the first half of 2023, what was initially considered a "niche and limited" category of re-released films experienced significant growth in cinemas. Animated films such as *Castle in the Sky, Detective Conan: The Phantom of Baker Street, Sword Art Online the Movie - Progressive: Scherzo of Deep Night, Valley of the Gods Adventure*, and *The Heike Story: Inu-Oh* achieved impressive box office results, owing to their broad audience base and high-quality storytelling. Among them, Hayao Miyazaki's *Castle in the Sky* was re-released in mainland China for the second time on June 1, 2023, coinciding with Children's Day. Following its initial re-release in 1992, this latest showing garnered a total box office revenue of 134 million RMB as of now. This article aims to focus on *Castle in the Sky*, providing a theoretical analysis and interpretation of the "re-screening phenomenon" of overseas animation by exploring two dimensions: phenomenon analysis and content text.

I. "Re-screening" as a Phenomenon

1.1 The Popularity of Overseas Animation "Re-screenings"

Tracing back to China's first re-released film, we find Disney's animated movie *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, which was re-screened in Shanghai in 1940. Originally premiered in 1937 and adapted from the German fairy tale by the Brothers Grimm, the film deeply inspired China's animation pioneer, Wan Laiming. In his preface, he wrote: "At that time, I thought, since Americans can create *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, showcasing their Western cultural characteristics, we can certainly produce *Princess Iron Fan* with our own national features." Subsequently, Wan Laiming assembled a team of over 100 people and, in 1941,

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completed China's first animated feature film, *Princess Iron Fan*, after two years of work. Currently, the re-screening of overseas animations in China can be broadly classified into two formats: one involves large-scale nationwide re-releases in collaboration between production companies and cinemas, which played a particularly crucial role in reviving cinemas during the three years of the pandemic. According to data from the Maoyan Professional platform, during the first month of full cinema reopening in 2020, 29 out of 44 films screened in theaters were re-releases, accounting for 66% of total film sources. Additionally, revenue from re-released films constituted approximately 45% of total box office earnings post-reopening[2]. Compared to live-action productions, animated films generally require longer production cycles. As a result, re-releasing high-quality overseas animated movies often proves to be more effective in filling gaps and driving the market. For instance, three classic Disney animations—*Coco* (2017), *Zootopia* (2016), and *Big Hero 6* (2015)—were re-released in mainland cinemas on July 20, 24, and 31 of 2020, respectively, playing a pivotal role during the initial revival phase of the animated film industry and cinema reopening.

Beyond mainstream cinemas, the re-screening of overseas animations can also be conducted by art film screening organizations or research centers in their affiliated cinemas, theaters, cultural centers, and other venues on a smaller regional scale. These screenings, often as part of competitive or thematic film festivals, cater specifically to enthusiasts or researchers of certain types of films. For animated shorts, the fourth edition of the Fantoche Animation Week in 2023 included exhibition units such as "50 Years of Moving Images: Georges Schwizgebel Retrospective" and "Tribute to the Late Animation Magician: Gil Alkabetz Retrospective." These retrospectives showcased the unique visual and auditory styles of these two overseas animation artists through re-screening their classic works. For animated features, the Beijing International Film Festival's "Colorful Animation" exhibition unit serves as a notable example. In 2021, this unit featured collections of Studio Ghibli's classic works as well as Gundam SEED theatrical series. Films like Kon Satoshi's *Dreaming Machine* and *Paranoia Agent* sold out within 12 seconds of opening ticket sales. In 2022, Mamoru Oshii's classic animated masterpiece *Ghost in the Shell* was re-screened in both 4K and IMAX formats, becoming one of the most popular films of that year's festival. In 2023, DreamWorks Animation's *Kung Fu Panda* hosted a 15th-anniversary special screening at the Beijing International Film Festival. The iconic line "Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift—that is why it's called the present" touched audiences deeply, rekindling their emotional connection even years after its original release. Promotional campaigns for re-released films often leverage slogans like "Back to Childhood" or "Catch Up on the Movie Ticket You Missed as a Kid" to stimulate nostalgic feelings in the target audience. As French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs explained: "Our impressions are shaped by the forms imposed by social life, albeit at the cost of losing some substance. Adults' longing for nature in society is essentially a longing for childhood." The psychological mechanism of nostalgia subtly accelerates the popularity of re-screened films as a cultural phenomenon.

1.2 Re-screening from a Psychoanalytic Perspective

Re-screening can, in some sense, be viewed as a cultural phenomenon rooted in the psychological mechanisms and emotional functions of nostalgia. The term "nostalgia" was first introduced by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer in 1688, referring to the negative emotional representation associated with homesickness. In the latter half of the 20th century, nostalgia was understood to encompass three aspects: First, on the cognitive level, nostalgia is the retrieval of memories; next, on the emotional level, nostalgia evokes a certain fragile sentiment; finally, on the desire level, nostalgia stimulates the longing to return to a certain state of the past. As research in psychoanalysis deepened, the mechanisms of nostalgia's effects on human cognition, emotions, and desires have been further explored. On the cognitive level, systematic studies led by psychologists Krystine Batcho and Erica Hepper revealed the diversity of nostalgic objects—nostalgia does not always relate to clear memories or specific things. Triggers for nostalgia can be personal or tied to specific people, places, or objects. However, they can also be abstract, historical atmospheres, such as a sense of "carefreeness," a vacation, or even an era one has never personally experienced[3]. The diversity of nostalgic objects stems from the

dynamic imagination within the emotional dimension, linking an individual's material reality with an idealized past. By piecing together symbolic information, the neural network forms detailed psychological simulations. This diversity also expands nostalgia's impact beyond fragile and negative emotions. In 1972, American psychiatrist Jack Kleiner recorded cases of nostalgic patients expressing joy, breaking the conventional association of nostalgia with melancholy. He distinguished nostalgia from homesickness, emphasizing that nostalgia is a blend of sorrow and happiness. Further research by psychologists Keith Markman and Matthew McMullen in 2003 pointed out that focusing on the feelings and states generated by simulated content can transform most negative emotions into positive satisfaction. In 2016, Japanese neuroscientists discovered heightened activity in brain regions associated with "reward" and "motivation" during nostalgic experiences[3]. These reward signals encourage individuals to replace negative emotions caused by simulated behavior with positive emotions generated by simulated content. On the level of desire, nostalgia manifests as the reintroduction of past experiences or attributes from specific times and spaces into the present reality, bringing individuals spiritual joy and fulfillment.

Thus, nostalgia can be seen as a creative psychological simulation mechanism that appeals to human cognition, emotion, and desire. It requires individuals to mobilize their perceptions and emotions, experiences and imagination, constructing a dynamic, experiential, symbolic, and strongly distinctive mental field within their neural networks. This field closely aligns with the mechanism of filmmaking—films use more vivid and directly audiovisual forms to immerse viewers in specific temporal and spatial structures, connecting viewers' emotions through plot progression and guiding their imagination through narrative arrangement. As a nostalgic object, re-released films not only evoke emotional resonance with their content but also integrate the cherished aspects of viewers' prior experiences watching these films. Together, these elements create the pleasure and satisfaction that re-released films provide. Therefore, as a cultural phenomenon, re-screening—especially in highly discussed cases among contemporary audiences—often reflects collective, social, and temporal psychological needs through the rise of nostalgia-driven cultural trends.

II. Content-Focused "Re-screening"

2.1 Content Text

Castle in the Sky tells the story of Sheeta and Pazu, a young girl and boy, as they embark on a magical adventure in search of the legendary floating castle, Laputa. During their quest, they use the innocence and purity of childhood to reform pirates and join forces to confront Muska, who seeks to dominate Laputa and conquer the world through technology and violence. From the perspective of character relationships and conflict, the narrative themes can be divided into two layers. Firstly, focusing on character relationships, the primary narrative theme is a celebration of friendship and courage among people. As Hayao Miyazaki mentioned in the planning proposal for *Castle in the Sky*: "The dedication, friendship, perseverance in belief, courage, and pursuit of ideals exhibited by the young characters in the film are the universal language that touches modern audiences." It is precisely this grasp of the qualities of truth, goodness, and beauty that imbues Miyazaki's works with the spiritual power to transcend time and cultural barriers, moving, healing, and inspiring audiences across the world.

From the perspective of conflict, the second layer of narrative themes in *Castle in the Sky* can be summarized as a call for humanistic care in the industrial age and a reflection on the relationship between "humankind and nature." In 1998, Hayao Miyazaki wrote an essay titled *Sacrifice in the Sky* for the Japanese Shincho Bunko publication of Saint-Exupéry's *Terre des Hommes* (Wind, Sand and Stars), in which he posed the question: "If humanity had not yet conquered the sky and the towering clouds above remained the domain of children's dreams, what kind of world would it be? After creating flying machines, have we gained more than we lost?" Aspiration and conquest, corresponding to innocence and desire, reflect the transformation of the human-nature relationship throughout civilization's development. In the film, Laputa, the floating city sus-

tained by "flight stones," symbolizes human wisdom, ambition, wealth, and labor. However, by violating the principle of "rooting in the earth and coexisting with the wind," Laputa ultimately meets its downfall. When the children, Sheeta and Pazu, recite the incantation that causes the destruction of Laputa, all mechanical constructs gradually crumble and collapse. The massive floating island is reduced to a single ancient tree with sprawling roots, drifting into the distant sky. In contrast, Muska, who seeks to exploit the flight stones and discover Laputa for his selfish desires, wields technology as a weapon, using violent and bloody means to eliminate opposition. He even employs robots as part of his arsenal, attempting to use Laputa's power to dominate the world. This transforms the flight stone from a "sacred artifact" into a "weapon of slaughter." Muska's eventual fate—falling into the ocean—creates a striking contrast with the elevated position of Laputa, satirizing the dehumanization brought by industrial civilization. This conveys the message that justice will prevail over evil, echoing the first-layer narrative theme of celebrating friendship and courage. The film's reflection on humanistic care and the human-nature relationship carries significant contemporary relevance in the context of the information age. At the start of 2023, the explosive growth of artificial intelligence applications brought unprecedented convenience to human life but also raised concerns about job displacement and anxiety over misinformation and virtual realities. Likewise, the intensifying effects of global warming, leading to extreme weather, have created numerous challenges for human production and daily life. Themes such as "life," "trees," "love and peace," "human future," and "anti-war" appeared most frequently in the short reviews of the film's audience, attesting to the depth of its narrative conflicts and reflecting contemporary concerns about living conditions and the future of humanity.

2.2 Artistic Style

The director of the animated film *Up*, Pete Docter, once shared his profound admiration for the artistic style of Hayao Miyazaki, which he experienced deeply while working as the English dubbing director for Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle*. He remarked, " In America, we are trained to capture the audience's attention by constantly introducing new situations, guiding their curiosity about the plot's progression, with a focus on driving and leading. However, what Miyazaki does is portray detailed and authentic moments. These moments may not seem to push the plot forward, but rather they focus on the characters' reactions to their circumstances. As viewers observe these bits and pieces, they find themselves drawn in and resonating deeply." This statement sheds light on the psychological mechanism behind Miyazaki's signature "simple," "healing," and "aesthetic" artistic style. Through both visual and auditory dimensions, he crafts a "pure light-and-sound ambiance" and emphasizes the detailed performances of characters within this setting, enabling viewers to immerse themselves and perceive the beauty of the scene with ease. The term "pure light-and-sound ambiance" describes a phenomenon where, when faced with entirely unfamiliar objects, the audience's usual "perception-action" chain is disrupted. This initiates a continuous process of rediscovering and delineating the features and contours of the unfamiliar object—over and over again, starting from scratch. This sustained activity allows the object to radiate its pure, intrinsic essence[4]. Gilles Deleuze likened this process to a state of "reverie," describing it as the essence of fantasy—a moment that seems to transcend our typical temporal constraints and arise automatically[4].

In animation creation, the emergence of "beauty" within such "pure light-and-sound ambiance" appeals directly to the senses. Creators must "construct a realm" on an audiovisual level to "express emotion." Whether a re-released classic animated film can leverage cutting-edge cinematic technology to offer audiences a more immersive and vivid audiovisual experience, while maximizing the distinct artistic style of the auteur, is seen as a key factor in determining whether the re-release can reignite viewers' interest. For instance, the re-release of *Castle in the Sky* is presented as the "officially digitally remastered version," undergoing processes such as image restoration, color grading, sound restoration, audio-visual synthesis, and quality assessment. This ensures an enhanced visual and auditory quality on the big screen. Visually, Hayao Miyazaki is skilled at using cinematic language and scene composition. When introducing unfamiliar settings, he employs long

shots to create expansive views, placing characters within serene, tranquil natural landscapes that vividly showcase the harmony between humans and nature. Additionally, influenced by GEKIGA (dramatic manga), Miyazaki focuses more on detailed depictions of character actions than on dazzling character movements or exaggerated transformations, which might provide momentary shock or joy. Rooted in universal everyday experiences, he imbues characters with human traits. For example, the iconic scene in *Castle in the Sky*, where Sheeta and Pazu lay on soft grass staring at the sky after landing on Laputa, continues to provide a healing effect for viewers, even more than a decade later. Beyond visuals, sound plays an invisible yet poignant role in shaping the ambiance. As a medium, sound is not merely about its material presence or information transmission—it stands out as an event-like existence binding all elements together[5]. For animation, particularly 2D animation, sound grants a stronger sense of spatial depth, dissolving gaps and collage-like effects between audiovisual units in the "imagined" spatiotemporal environment. This is particularly evident in Miyazaki's sound design. For instance, natural sounds lay the foundation for the narrative atmosphere, bringing a "breath" and "vividness" to his films. When Sheeta and Pazu discover Muska's spaceship on Laputa, the audience can hear footsteps, wind, rustling trees, propeller movements, and soldiers' shouts. Though not a single line reveals their psychological state, the tension is palpable. Furthermore, the music in *Castle in the Sky* incorporates distinct ethnic elements. The combination of percussion and orchestral instruments produces a "stepwise" melody that resonates with the evolving emotional states of the characters. This unity of sound and image, this blending of scene and emotion, reflects Miyazaki's success in capturing the universally recognizable "beautiful" imagery in human experiences. By accurately depicting genuine, lively actions and expressions of characters within these moments and pairing them with the immersive "black box" environment of cinema, audiences find it easier to lose themselves in the "beauty" of his creations.

2.3 Promotional Strategies

On January 27, 1986, then Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone emphasized the importance of studying Japanese culture during his policy speech. He argued that Japan should no longer only absorb foreign cultures, but also recognize its own identity and strive to disseminate its culture abroad. He envisioned transforming Japan from being a "receiver" of culture to a "transmitter" of culture. To reflect this vision, he directed the Ministry of Education to allocate ¥67 million in the annual budget for the establishment of the "International Research Center for Japanese Culture."[6] This directive highlights the government's substantial focus and support during the pivotal period of shaping Japan's cultural identity, which coincided with a rising sense of national consciousness among Japanese citizens. The animated film *Castle in the Sky* was first released in 1986 and subsequently distributed overseas in regions such as Hong Kong, the United States, the United Kingdom, Mainland China, Taiwan Region, France, Canada, Italy, South Korea, Australia, Germany, Austria, Turkey, Poland, Belgium, Russia, and Finland. It became one of the Japanese animated films of the 1980s that combined domestic recognition with global influence. The Japanese website "goo" conducted a poll regarding promotional slogans of Studio Ghibli animations. *Castle in the Sky* ranked third with its slogan, "One day, a girl fell from the sky... (ある日、少女が空から降ってきた…)." Unlike traditional slogans that typically highlight the film's central theme, this slogan focuses on the scene where the female protagonist Sheeta makes her appearance—a pivotal moment where the fates of the two main characters intersect and change. This reflects the promotional strategy during the film's premiere, which largely revolved around character relationships. This focus is also evident in the poster designs. In the posters released in Japan, Germany, and South Korea during the same period, the main characters Sheeta and Pazu occupy the visual center. In the Japanese poster, Pazu and Sheeta are shown flying in a glider over Laputa. While the German and Korean posters feature different backgrounds, they both depict Sheeta and Pazu holding hands while floating in the air. The posters emphasize their intimate and friendly relationship, while additional visual elements—such as the mysterious floating kingdom, steampunk-style industrial buildings, and the boundless sky—convey a sense of adventure and courage. This aligns with the previously discussed thematic analysis, specifically the

first layer that celebrates friendship and bravery between individuals.

In 2023, *Castle in the Sky* was re-released in Mainland China to celebrate Children's Day. The promotional slogan used by the content platform was "Because of innocence," while the ticketing platform's slogan was "Dedicated to every child and to those who were once children." The main poster was presented as a dynamic 3D design, creating a visually and emotionally captivating experience. In this poster, the robot's moss-covered hand appears in the upper left corner, slowly reaching downward. Sheeta emerges from the lower right corner of the frame, and when her hand touches the robot's, flowers bloom atop the moss. The camera then zooms out, revealing a dramatic scene: purple gradient clouds being pierced by red lasers, with flames and clouds blending together. This composition creates a striking contrast between Muska's military airships and the floating city of Laputa. The visual juxtaposition evokes strong emotions and metaphorically conveys the film's deeper narrative theme—specifically, the second layer of its message, which calls for reflection on human compassion in the industrial era and the relationship between humanity and nature. For adults who "were once children," this thematic layer carries a profound significance, stirring thoughts on human destiny and the future. For younger audiences who are "still children," the use of dynamic poster design—incorporating camera motion, shifting light and shadow, and color contrasts—combined with emotional musical cues, provides enhanced visual appeal compared to static posters. This makes the design highly engaging and effective in attracting potential viewers.

2.4 Derivative Collaborations

Whether derivative works and brand collaborations can achieve "breakout" effects and generate positive economic and cultural benefits largely depends on the marketing team's deep understanding of the film IP's inherent style, thematic expression, and target audience. Hui Wang, General Manager of the Wanda Cinemas Nanjing region, once stated in an interview: "The development of derivative products is an extension of the narrative of the film itself. By targeting specific groups and designing with unique film elements, derivative products can achieve higher recognition. If used effectively, they can give the film IP a longer and more vibrant life."[7] In animation, derivative products often focus on character-centered designs—stationery, collectibles, apparel, accessories, beauty products, and consumer electronics are common formats. However, the re-release of Castle in the Sky in Mainland China in 2023 broke new ground in this area. Derivative collaborations were closely aligned with the artistic traits of "hand-drawn 2D animation" and "beautifully moving visuals," extending the film's advantages in "world-building." Visual (Targeting Children and Teen Audiences): In 2022, Studio Ghibli officially released the simplified Chinese version of the *Castle in the Sky* picture book in Mainland China. The editorial team carefully selected iconic scenes from the film, matched with innocent and playful dialogue, translated by Yujiao Zhao (translator of *Totto-Chan: The Little Girl at the Window*). Studio Ghibli oversaw the translations and maintained strict control over the printing color standards. The picture book was simultaneously promoted online and offline during the film's re-release. Sound (Targeting Broader Audiences): Tied closely to the ticket platform's slogan "Dedicated to every child and to those who were once children," Ghibli Animation's original soundtrack concerts took place in cities like Guangzhou and Chongqing in June 2023. These concerts invited "Miyazaki's dedicated singer," Azumi Inoue, to perform classics, including *Castle in the Sky*'s theme song. Her daughter, YUYU, joined as a special guest, and their mother-daughter duet echoed the parent-child viewing concept emphasized during the Children's Day re-release. In July 2023, the *Castle in the Sky: Joe Hisaishi & Hayao Miyazaki Animation Works Audiovisual Concert* was staged at Hangzhou's Jinsha Lake Grand Theater, featuring performances by the professional mainland music group Four No Music. Accompanied by meticulously edited high-definition film clips on a large screen, the concert provided audiences with a time-traveling, emotionally resonant musical journey. The fusion of sound, visuals, performance, and singing revitalized the multi-dimensional artistic appeal of the animated film. During a post-pandemic era marked by the resurgence of offline art-themed events, this approach offered Chinese Miyazaki fans a sensory-driven experience. It also served as a valuable reference for planning derivative collaboration

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projects in the animation industry.

III. Conclusion

As a cultural form that embodies the humanistic richness and distinct characteristics of a specific era, the re-release of films and the history they carry—individual and societal—jointly shape their cultural significance in a contemporary context. These works often focus on a universal spiritual core that transcends time and cultural barriers, such as the call for love and peace and the exploration of the relationship between humanity and nature in *Castle in the Sky*. They also possess distinctive artistic traits and can offer superior viewing experiences under new screening technologies, moving audiences through beauty and emotion. On this foundation, the precision-targeted promotional strategies and derivative project developments aimed at potential audiences allow the works to achieve an ideal long-tail effect. This satisfies the diverse spiritual and cultural needs of audiences, revitalizes the Chinese film market, and drives coordinated development in related industries. For creators, observing successful phenomena in re-releases with strong audience feedback can help identify domestic viewers' psychological demands and aesthetic preferences in cultural consumption. This insight serves as a reference for exploring pathways for Chinese animation "to go global." Future creations could aim to produce peak works that resonate with Chinese cultural identity while incorporating a global perspective and humanistic care.

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A Study on Cultural Archetype and Transformation in Animation in the Globalized Film Market —The Case of the Loong

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Abstract

On February 18, 2025, the Chinese animation *Ne Zha 2* achieved remarkable success at the domestic box office, surpassing several Hollywood animations to top the global animation box office chart. However, its performance in international markets was relatively modest. This phenomenon is part of a broader trend, as animations from countries outside of the United States have generally underperformed in global markets, prompting scholars to critically examine issues of cross-cultural communication. In contrast, Hollywood film studios, with their advanced 3D modeling and special effects technologies, have been adept at adapting and reshaping cultural representations to cater to a global audience, ensuring repeated success in the international box office. From the perspective of cultural communication, the underlying factor driving the success of Hollywood animation lies in its nuanced approach to cultural archetype adaptations, which allows various cultural symbols to resonate widely with global audiences. This success provides a compelling example of how animations from other countries can achieve international dissemination. This study centers on the theory of cultural archetypes, using the 'Loong' as a case study to compare how Hollywood and Chinese animations adapt and portray this symbol. It explores the transformation and re-presentation of this cultural archetype within cross-cultural communication. The research suggests that in adapting cultural archetypes for the current global entertainment landscape, these symbols retain some traditional connotations yet undergo necessary transformations and simplifications to align with diverse audience expectations.

Keywords: Cultural Archetype, Animation, Loong, Archetype Theory, Collective Unconscious

I. Introduction

Hollywood's movie and animation production technologies are globally dominant, with Disney and other Hollywood studios creating a plethora of beloved works for audiences worldwide through their masterful 3D modeling and special effects. In recent years, Chinese cultural elements have been increasingly integrated into Hollywood films' product designs and marketing strategies[1]. Films such as *Mulan* and the *Kung Fu Panda* series incorporate Chinese cultural narratives, while many other Hollywood productions showcase iconic Chinese symbols, including traditional attire, food, and the Four Treasures of the Study. These works excel in both visual effects and technical quality, and through global market promotion, they introduce Chinese cultural symbols and stories to a wide international audience. Despite their technical excellence, however, these films' adaptations and interpretations of Chinese cultural contexts have nonetheless sparked significant criticism and discussion.

As Chinese culture becomes more prevalent in Western media, particularly in Hollywood animation, these cultural archetypes are gradually becoming familiar to Western audiences. In the process of crosscultural communication, the portrayal of Chinese cultural archetypes often undergoes reinterpretation or transformation. The concept of cultural archetypes was first introduced by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, who defined

them as universal symbols and patterns deeply embedded in the collective unconscious of humanity[2]. These archetypes appear similarly across diverse cultures and societies, and they are widely utilized in mythology, religion, literature, and the arts. Chinese culture is rich in cultural archetypes, such as the hero, the loving mother, the wise sage, and others. These archetypes frequently emerge across different cultures and historical periods and are transmitted and re-enacted through films and literature. This re-enactment process reflects not only Western creators' interpretations of Chinese culture but also highlights the cultural differences between the East and West in terms of their expressions and embrace of cultural symbols.

While every culture possesses its own distinct traditions and appeal, Hollywood animation does not always offer an accurate depiction of these cultures[3]. Research indicates that Hollywood animators have infused American-centric stereotypes into their animations. For example, the 1998 Hollywood film Mulan emphasizes individualism from a Western viewpoint while neglecting the collectivism that is intrinsic to Chinese culture[4]. It also conveys certain cultural and social group stereotypes through various animal characters[5]. Similarly, the portrayals of Latin Americans, Indigenous people, and Eastern cultures in films like *The Three Caballeros* and *Peter Pan* are marked by overt stereotypes[6].

With the continuous improvement in the production quality of Chinese animation in recent years, an increasing number of domestically produced animated works featuring Chinese cultural elements have achieved significant success in the market. These films not only highlight the unique appeal of traditional Chinese culture but have also garnered widespread recognition from domestic audiences. A prime example is the 2019 release *Ne Zha*, which grossed approximately 5 billion RMB at the box office[7]. Its sequel, *Ne Zha*, also achieved impressive box office results in China. Although it topped the global animation box office chart, its commercial success was primarily driven by the Chinese market. Research indicates that Chinese animation can benefit from Hollywood's experience and techniques in adapting cultural archetypes to enhance its international appeal. Consequently, it is crucial to investigate in detail how Hollywood animation adapts Chinese cultural archetypes, as this can offer valuable insights for promoting the global expansion and dissemination of Chinese animation.

Over the past 30 years, both Chinese and Hollywood animation have prominently featured the Loong. The image and significance of the loong vary significantly across different animated works. These portrayals often involve the adaptation and reshaping of the "Loong" in response to varying aesthetic traditions, cultural contexts, and market demands, resulting in an image that maintains some connection to the original cultural archetype, while simultaneously diverging from it. Therefore, this study will use the Loong as a case study for archetype research. First, the study will explore the theory of cultural archetypes, with particular attention given to how these archetypes convey meaning through symbols, character development, and narrative structure. Secondly, the study will compile research on the Loong, summarizing its image and cultural significance. By comparing how the cultural archetype of the "Loong" is represented in both Hollywood and Chinese animations, this study investigates the transformation and re-presentation of cultural archetypes within cross-cultural communication. Although Hollywood and Chinese animations emphasize different aspects in shaping the Loong, both adaptation strategies possess unique artistic value and cultural considerations. Whether it is Hollywood's reinterpretation of the Loong or Chinese animation's innovative adaptations based on traditional symbols, both approaches reflect a deliberate transformation of cultural archetypes to better align with their respective storylines and cater to the needs of audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds. Through this comparative analysis, this research seeks to interpret the artistic decisions and cultural strategies surrounding the Loong across different contexts, aiming to uncover valuable insights for achieving the effective dissemination and reproduction of cultural symbols in a globalized world.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Overview of Archetype

The term "archetype" first appeared around 20 BCE, coined by the prominent Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo, who used it to describe the "image of God" inherent in humans[8]. In Western psychology, the term archetype corresponds to two key concepts: "Archetype" and "Prototype." Carl Jung expanded on Freud's theory of the unconscious, arguing that the unconscious mind is not only expressed through an individual's "libido" impulses but can also be divided into two major components: the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious represents the deepest and most hidden aspect of the psyche. Jung believed that archetypes are manifestations of the collective unconscious, referring to recurring images found in myths, religions, dreams, and literature. These archetypes constitute a collective memory, a national cultural psychology, and a spirit shaped through long-term cultural practices within a society or ethnic group. They are preserved through cultural continuity rather than material inheritance[9].

Northrop Frye further developed the theory of archetypes, particularly in the context of literary analysis. Frye argued that archetypes predominantly exist within myths and are intricately connected to them. Archetypes can take various forms, including images, themes, characters, and situations, and are often recurring, conventional, and stable structural elements in literature[10]. A key distinction between Frye's approach and Jung's is that Frye believed archetypes should be sought from primitive cultures. Rather than identifying archetypes from dreams or primal imagery, Frye suggested that the plot, characters, and symbolic elements in literary works can be analyzed through archetypes[11]. According to Frye, all literary works stem from fundamental archetypal patterns, and literary creation essentially consists of the repetition and variation of these archetypes. This theory expands the concept of archetypes from Jung's psychological framework to the realm of cultural symbols and narrative structures, providing a new perspective for the interdisciplinary application of archetype theory. As a result, archetypes have evolved from a psychological concept to a literary one, underscoring their significance in literary works.

Through a macro study of British literature, Frye identified recurring structural elements in literature, such as images that play a crucial role in the Western literary tradition. Over time, these images have undergone extensive historical evolution, continually being repeated and enriched. As myths gradually evolved into literature, the protagonists shifted from gods to humans. While cultural archetypes were not directly observable, they could be shaped into anthropomorphic and visual forms, often taking the shape of archetypal characters. The manifestations of archetypes are highly varied, but common archetypes include the Hero, the Wise Old Man, and the Shadow, among others. These symbols are transmitted and preserved within the collective memory of humanity through stories, myths, legends, and dreams. Although each archetype may manifest differently across various cultures, its core characteristics and functions remain universally present. For example, the Hero archetype may appear in distinct forms across cultures, but its fundamental narrative structure—progressing from challenge to growth, and ultimately to victory—is consistent. Joseph Campbell expanded on this idea, developing the concept of the Hero's Journey, a comprehensive framework that outlines the seventeen stages a hero must undergo in their adventure. This structure can be seen not only in mythic tales from different cultures and religions but also in modern popular media[12], particularly in Hollywood films, where it is frequently employed.

2.2 The Manifestation Archetype of in Film and Animation

Archetype theory is not only pivotal in the realm of literature but also serves as a powerful analytical framework in film and animation studies. Film is a complex medium of symbolic content, conveyingrich audiovisual information to the audience through storytelling. In both film and animation, archetypes are expressed through characters, narratives, and visual symbols, becoming integral elements in both storytelling and character development[13]. As primary vehicles for modern cultural dissemination, film and animation possess significant cross-cultural influence, meaning that the archetypal symbols within them often reflect local cultures while also demonstrating the reproduction and transformation of these symbols in cross-cultural communication.

The hero archetype is one of the most common and enduring representations in film, particularly in Hollywood productions, where the hero often embodies idealized traits such as strength, courage, and justice. For example, in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) films, heroes not only possess extraordinary abilities but are also tasked with a moral mission to defend world peace and uphold justice. These heroes achieve their objectives through growth, struggle, and eventual triumph. Take Tony Stark in *Iron Man*—he overcomes personal weaknesses, ultimately evolving into a key figure in saving the world, thereby exemplifying the classic hero archetype. This film not only achieved remarkable success but also propelled Marvel to begin constructing the MCU. Today, the MCU has reached incredible box office milestones, enjoying widespread audience admiration, and has set the standard for superhero films globally.

Archetypes are also prevalent in animation, particularly in works produced by companies such as Disney and DreamWorks. Many of Disney's classic animations, including *The Lion King* and *Frozen*, prominently feature archetypes such as the hero, the shadow, and the mother—characters that resonate deeply with universal human experiences[14, 15]. In these films, the hero often embarks on a journey of self-discovery, overcoming both internal and external challenges. For example, in *The Lion King*, Simba must confront his inner fears and external adversaries to fulfill his destiny as king. The animation, with its distinctive visual symbols such as character design and background settings, effectively brings these archetypes to life, allowing the audience to connect with them on an emotional level.

The cross-cultural re-presentation of cultural symbols in contemporary films and animations is becoming increasingly significant. Through the process of cross-cultural communication, archetypal symbols not only maintain their traditional meanings but are also adapted and reinterpreted within a globalized context. For example, in the *Kung Fu Panda* series, the hero's development, the masterapprentice dynamic, and the portrayal of kung fu as a symbol of strength can all be analyzed through archetypal theory. Additionally, cultural symbols from non-Western traditions, such as loongs, kung fu, and family values in Chinese culture, are often reinterpreted through cross-cultural communication, making them more accessible to a global audience. This transformation of archetypes not only reflects the mutual influence of diverse cultures but also illustrates the blending of cultures in the context of globalization. However, while archetype theory offers an effective framework for understanding character dynamics in films and animations, critics argue that excessive reliance on these established templates may restrict the diversity of contemporary narratives. Adhering too strictly to conventional archetypal structures could stifle innovation, leading to a lack of originality and complexity in storytelling[16].

2.3 The Origin and Development of the Loong

The concept of loongs appears in nearly every culture around the world[17], yet, as history and culture evolved, the image and symbolic meaning of loongs varied across regions. The Loong (loong) is a deeply ingrained symbol in Chinese culture, representing power, strength, and good fortune, with origins tracing back over 8,000 years[18]. Unlike a real animal, the Loong is a mythical creature whose image has continually evolved over time.

Prior to the Qin Dynasty, loong motifs were frequently associated with sacrificial and ceremonial practices, commonly regarded as symbols of the 'water deity' linked to thunderstorms. During this period, loong patterns were featured on ritual vessels and totems used in sacrifices, reflecting hopes for favorable weather and bountiful harvests. Particularly during the Xia, Shang, and Zhou Dynasties, loong motifs predominantly appeared on bronze ritual vessels. As a mysterious and unpredictable entity, the loong symbolized the connection between heaven, earth, humans, and gods[19].

In the Qin and Han Dynasties, influenced by Taoist beliefs surrounding immortality, loongs were often depicted as elongated, serpentine beings, envisioned as messengers transporting souls to the heavens. The political strength of the Tang Dynasty further reinforced the loong as a symbol of imperial authority and royal power. In tomb murals, silk paintings, architectural decorations, and other artistic forms, the loong's image

was often depicted as luxurious and majestic. The classification of loongs by the number of claws—five or four—had strict hierarchical distinctions in court rituals[20].

During this period, the increased exchange between Eastern and Western cultures, along with the introduction of non-Chinese native animal imagery, enriched the loong's representation. It was not until the Song Dynasty, however, that the image of the loong became clearly defined. Its head resembled that of an ox, its mouth that of a donkey, its eyes those of a shrimp, its horns those of a deer, its ears those of an elephant, its scales those of a fish, its hair that of a human, its belly that of a snake, and its feet that of a phoenix[21].

After the Yuan Dynasty, the regulation of loong insignia became more stringent. Apart from government-issued silks and fabrics, common people were prohibited from using fabrics adorned with loong patterns[19]. The Ming and Qing dynasties represented the peak periods for the use of loongs in China, with only the emperor permitted to display loong motifs. During this time, the loong gradually evolved from its image as a celestial being associated with rain and clouds to a symbol of imperial power.
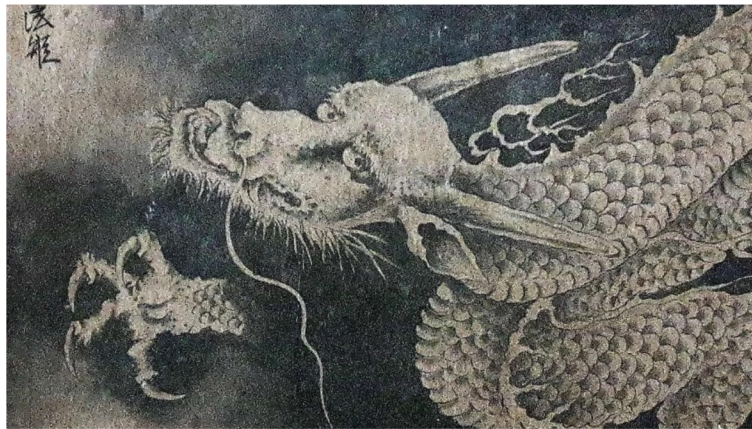

Fig. 1. Chen Rong's 'Cloud Loong' from the Song Dynasty in China

Following the disintegration of feudal society, the imperial and exclusive associations of the loong began to loosen, and its use among the general populace became more widespread. In particular, since the mid-1980s, the popularity of the song *Descendants of the Loong* has catalyzed an unprecedented resurgence in loong culture. As the totem and symbol of the Chinese nation, the loong has become deeply embedded in Chinese culture, with the Chinese people referring to themselves as the "Descendants of the Loong"[19].

In the contemporary era, with advancements in modern technology, the loong continues to evolve and transform within visual arts, contemporary design, and film media. 3D modeling technology has facilitated the preservation and innovation of the traditional loong image, successfully bridging the gap between ancient aesthetics and modern visual representations[22]. These digital renditions of the loong not only highlight its posture, colors, and intricate details but also ensure that its cultural essence remains intact in modern interpretations[23], cementing its place as one of the key "Chinese symbols" in crosscultural communication.

III. The Conflict between Chinese Cultural Archetypes and Modern Narratives

Some scholars argue that while Hollywood's advanced production technologies allow for the precise recreation of images and scenes, the true cultural expression in films cannot be achieved through technology alone[24]. When conveying cultural connotations, local directors are often better equipped to shape images and characters that align with the cultural meanings inherent in the original archetype. If the narrative structure effectively reflects the philosophical ideas of the local culture, the deeper connotations of cultural archetypes will be more fully experienced and transmitted. However, as a mass entertainment medium, animations can encounter challenges if the characters overly emphasize specific cultural meanings. While this may resonate with a small audience familiar with the relevant cultural context, it can create a barrier for the broader audi-

ence lacking that background, potentially limiting the work's popularity and commercial success.

Chinese cultural archetypes are deeply rooted in the mythological philosophy of ancient texts such as the *ShanHai Jing* and the *Yijing*. Ancient Chinese culture centers on concepts such as the unity of heaven, earth, and humanity, the balance of yin and yang, and the harmonization of opposites—reflecting a worldview where nature and humanity coexist in dynamic equilibrium[25]. In Chinese mythology, symbols like the loong, phoenix, and Kunpeng no longer represent opposition but instead maintain a balanced flow through the mutual transformation of opposing elements[25]. These archetypes not only play an essential role in rituals, ceremonies, and cultural practices, maintaining social order and transmitting moral norms, but also form the core of Chinese social ethics and collective identity. However, this narrative approach, deeply rooted in China's historical, cultural, and philosophical traditions, can create a disconnect when compared to the narrative techniques used by modern media. These profound cultural concepts have not yet found a systematic or structured model for their presentation in contemporary narratives.

Mainstream film narratives today are often built upon Western literary and mythological traditions, particularly those derived from ancient Greek texts, the Bible, and medieval literature. Archetype theory has proven effective in addressing themes such as heroism, seasonal cycles, and the binary opposition of good and evil, reflecting the philosophical emphasis on conflict and opposition in Western thought. As Frye emphasizes, symbols such as the hero, the wise man, and the shadow—frequently appearing in Western literature—are transmitted through narratives and embedded in the collective memory of humanity. They highlight the individual's pivotal role in social conflict and reconstruction[11]. Influenced by archetype theory, Joseph Campbell introduced the "Hero's Journey" narrative structure in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. This structure outlines the hero's journey from answering the call, embarking on an adventure, enduring trials, undergoing rebirth, and ultimately returning home[26]. It not only encapsulates the universal human desire for growth, transformation, and self-overcoming but also mirrors the structural patterns present in cross-cultural narratives. Consequently, the "Hero's Journey" model has gained worldwide recognition and adoption by Hollywood filmmakers, screenwriters, and directors[27]. From *Star Wars* to *The Lord of the Rings* and many other iconic films, this narrative structure has been deftly incorporated, resonating emotionally with global audiences and contributing to the commercial success of these films in international markets[28].

ACT	Hero'sjourney
Departure	1. The Call to Adventure 2. Refusal of the Call 3. Supernatural Aid 4. The Crossing of the First Threshold 5. Belly of the Whale
Initiation	6. The Road of Trials 7. The Meeting with the Goddess 8. Woman as the Temptress 9. Atonement with the Father 10. Apotheosis
Return	12. Refusal of the Return 13. The Magic Flight 14. Rescue from Without 15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold 16. Master of the Two Worlds

Table 1. The 17 Stages of the Hero's Journey

In modern media, including animation and film, Chinese cultural archetypes have yet to establish a fixed narrative pattern. In contrast to the mature, globally recognized hero narratives of the West, Chinese cultural archetypes often struggle to retain their traditional depth while adapting to the stylistic conventions of

mainstream entertainment. This has led to a lack of widespread recognition for these archetypes in the international market. The challenge, therefore, lies in effectively integrating traditional Chinese archetypes into modern narratives within the context of globalization—preserving their cultural essence while ensuring they resonate with a broad, global audience. This issue has become a critical focus in the creation of contemporary Chinese animations.

IV. Case Analysis

The loong holds a significant place in Chinese culture, symbolizing power, nobility, and natural forces in Eastern traditions. It not only appears in myths and legends but is also deeply embedded in China's history, philosophy, and artistic expressions. In both Chinese and Hollywood animations, the image of the Loong frequently emerges within narratives rooted in Chinese culture. However, Hollywood's adaptation of Chinese cultural archetypes tends to be more widely accepted by global audiences and consistently performs well at the international box office. While outstanding works of Chinese animation may achieve significant box office success within China, their performance on the global stage has often been underwhelming. This chapter will examine the cultural archetype of the Loong as a case study to analyze and compare its adaptation and representation in both Chinese and Hollywood animation. By doing so, we aim to explore the underlying logic and practical significance of cultural archetype adaptation in the context of the global film market.

4.1 Loongs in Hollywood Animation

Mulan is a 1998 animation produced by Disney, based on the narrative poem "The Ballad of Mulan", which dates back to the Northern and Southern Dynasties period in China. The story follows a young woman who disguises herself as a man to take her father's place in the army, in order to protect her family and save the country. While much of the discussion surrounding this film focuses on feminist themes and heroism, the portrayal of the loong, Mushu, also generates significant debate.

In *Mulan*, Mushu serves as the guardian spirit of the Mulan family. Although his design incorporates some Chinese elements and artistic styles, it is evident that he carries a strong American influence, which contrasts sharply with the traditional image of the Loong[29]. In the film, Mushu's original mission is to awaken other powerful ancestral guardians to assist Mulan by striking the family's "Ancestor Shrine Tablet." However, Mushu accidentally breaks the tablet, which prevents him from summoning the true guardians. As a result, he decides to take matters into his own hands, becoming Mulan's personal protector and helping her secure victory in the army, ultimately restoring his own honor.

Fig. 2. Mushu the Loong in the 1998 animated version of Mulan

In Chinese culture, the loong symbolizes power, dignity, and natural forces, often representing imperial authority and social order. However, in *Mulan*, the symbolic meaning of the loong undergoes a transformation. Mushu, the loong, is portrayed as a small, humorous, and lively character who takes on the role of protecting

and guiding Mulan, rather than embodying the traditional image of divinity and majesty. He serves as a more individualized guardian, acting as Mulan's companion and advisor throughout her journey. Although the appearance of Mushu resembles that of the traditional Loong, in terms of symbolism, he aligns more closely with the role of a 'helper' or 'mentor' in Western cultural archetypes. This function contrasts with the cultural significance of loongs in Chinese tradition. The traditional Loong symbolizes social order, family honor, and is deeply connected to imperial power and collectivism. While Mushu initially appears as the guardian of the Hua Mulan family, his role evolves throughout the narrative. The character of Mushu embodies a shift toward personal heroism, helping Mulan achieve individual success rather than maintaining family honor or symbolizing societal power.

Similarly, *Kung Fu Panda* (2008), an animation produced by DreamWorks, draws inspiration from one of China's most iconic animals—the panda. The story follows Po, a clumsy and self-doubting panda who is unexpectedly chosen as the Dragon Warrior, tasked with defending his homeland. Under the guidance of his master, Po gradually overcomes his insecurities and grows into a true kung fu master. Meanwhile, the villainous Tai Lung attempts to steal the powerful Dragon Scroll. Ultimately, Po defeats Tai Lung through confidence and unique wisdom, proving that true strength comes from within. This narrative mirrors the personal growth and self-discovery archetype found in Western storytelling, while still embedding elements of Chinese culture, such as the concept of inner strength.

Fig. 3. The Dragon Scroll in the 2008 animation Kung Fu Panda

In *Kung Fu Panda*, the image of the loong is predominantly embodied through the titles of Dragon Warrior and the Dragon Scroll. The Dragon Warrior is prophesied to be a hero with supreme power, while the Dragon Scroll is considered a mystical artifact that grants this power. Both the title and the scroll evoke reverence for strength and spiritual enlightenment, aligning with the traditional symbolism of the loong in Chinese culture as a symbol of authority, good fortune, and power. In the animation, Po, the Dragon Warrior, defeats Tai Lung not only through kung fu and physical strength but by combining inner confidence and wisdom. This narrative approach resonates with the cultural symbolism of the Dragon, which represents balance and harmony.

Hollywood's cultural adaptation of the Loong reflects the distortion and recreation of cultural archetypes within different cultural contexts. To serve the narrative, the image of the loong is infused with Western humor and entertainment functions. This adaptation highlights Hollywood's tendency to Westernize non-Western cultural symbols. The character of Mushu, the loong, departs drastically from the deep cultural connotations of the loong in Chinese tradition, reducing Mushu to a humorous companion and friend to Mulan. This reimagining caters to the entertainment preferences of a global audience, fulfilling commercial objectives. While some scholars regard this transformation as a misreading, misinterpretations often serve as the initial step toward bridging cultural divides, ultimately fostering recognition and acceptance when different cultures meet[30]. After Western audiences were introduced to Chinese culture through Mulan, despite the sig-

nificant adaptation of the loong image, this misreading sparked broader interest. Over the following decade, as cultural exchanges deepened, audiences gradually developed a richer understanding and appreciation of the loong's significance in Chinese culture. In *Kung Fu Panda*, the symbolic representation of the loong aligns more closely with the traditional image found in Chinese culture—it not only signifies strength but also embodies wisdom and inner balance. Although the film still adheres to a Western narrative structure, the title of 'Dragon Warrior' and the wisdom conveyed by the 'Dragon Scroll' reflect the symbolic nature of the loong in Chinese culture, which represents harmony with nature, authority, and inner power. The successful adaptation of Chinese cultural archetypes in *Kung Fu Panda* has contributed to its remarkable global box office success.

4.2 Loongs in Chinese Animation

In *Ne Zha*, the portrayal of loongs plays a significant role in the storyline and cultural context. Ao Bing and Ao Guang are central to the mythological framework, with Ao Bing representing the younger generation's struggles and aspirations, while Ao Guang symbolizes the authority and responsibility of the elder generation. These loongs are not merely mythical creatures but embody the historical and cultural significance of loongs in Chinese traditions. In the Shang Dynasty, loongs were often regarded as "rain gods" with dominion over storms and the seas, reinforcing their association with power, control over nature, and divine protection.

This alignment of loong characters with their cultural and historical symbolism gives *Ne Zha* a deeper layer of cultural authenticity while also presenting these archetypes in a way that resonates with contemporary audiences. The film's portrayal of the loong figures reflects both traditional mythological themes and modern narrative techniques, offering an engaging exploration of the archetype's transformation in animated form.

Fig. 4. Ao Bing in the animation Ne Zha

Although *Ne Zha* earned $720 million at the box office in China after its release, it only grossed $6.46 million overseas[7]. The stark contrast between its domestic success and poor international performance has prompted Chinese scholars to reflect on the factors contributing to this phenomenon. Language barriers, cultural differences, and contrasting values are considered significant reasons for its underperformance in foreign markets[31]. The animation is filled with cultural references, items, and spells familiar to Chinese audiences but largely unfamiliar to international viewers. These cultural disparities, along with differences in values, are also reflected in the narrative structure.

Ao Bing, one of the central characters, is originally born from a spiritual pearl, symbolizing kindness and justice. However, due to his family's mission, he is compelled to harm innocent people at Chen Tang Pass. By the end of the film, after the conflict is resolved, Ao Bing, moved by Nezha's actions, is willing to sacrifice his life to face the impending calamity alongside him. Throughout the animation, neither Nezha—the so-called "demon child"—nor Ao Bing, the "spiritual pearl," is depicted as a fixed villain. Their dynamic is one of opposition and unity, ultimately leading to mutual transcendence. This philosophical undercurrent, deeply rooted in Chinese thought, is easily grasped by Chinese audiences[32]. However, condensing the rich cultural and philosophical layers into a mere two-hour film makes it difficult for foreign viewers to fully appreciate the

deeper meanings embedded within the narrative.

4.3 Discussion

The cultural archetype of the Loong, as depicted in both Chinese and Hollywood animation, not only illustrates the global spread and influence of Chinese cultural symbols but also highlights the simplification and reshaping of local cultural meanings in the international market. On one hand, through global media platforms and advanced animation technology, the image of the loong has been widely disseminated, bolstering the international presence of Chinese culture. On the other hand, to meet Western audiences' expectations for heroic narratives, the loong's multi-layered cultural significance has been reinterpreted. While this has somewhat diminished its original depth, it has also made the loong's image more aligned with international aesthetic standards.

This transformation of cultural archetypes extends beyond the adaptation of the Loong image; other cultural symbols also undergo similar processes in cross-cultural communication. In an era marked by continuous cultural exchange and integration, creating films that balance profound cultural connotations while remaining accessible to global audiences presents a significant challenge. In this context, the adaptation and fusion of cultural archetypes will become increasingly widespread, yet also more contentious. To cater to the global market, these cultural symbols are often reinterpreted and transformed during the narrative process. This is not merely a simplification of culture, but also a complex act of recreation. In doing so, these films facilitate the collision and blending of different cultures.

Archetypes are not static, unchanging symbols; they must be conveyed through specific plots and stories to transmit their deeper symbolic meaning and cultural essence. Originally rooted in mythology and literature, these archetypes continue to be passed down through modern media such as film. The cross-cultural transmission of cultural symbols has accelerated the evolution of archetypes, enabling them to better adapt to today's media environment and entertainment demands. In the context of globalization and the blending of diverse cultures, archetypal symbols that were once deeply embedded in specific cultural traditions are undergoing processes of adaptation and transformation to resonate with global audiences. Modern media, such as film and television, reconstruct these archetypes using highly visual and simplified methods, making them more attuned to the demands of mass entertainment. This reshaping not only enhances the entertainment value and universality of these archetypes but also facilitates their broader understanding and acceptance by audiences from various cultural backgrounds.

V. Conclusion

This study integrates Chinese and Western philosophical perspectives and narrative traditions, conducting a comparative analysis of archetype theory. It also examines the adaptation of the Loong archetype in both Hollywood and Chinese animation. From mythology and literature to contemporary films and animations, cultural archetypes are continuously evolving as media technology advances. With the progress of animation techniques, animation as a visual medium offers new opportunities for expressing the loong as a traditional cultural symbol, reshaping its image in various ways. Today, the portrayal of loongs extends beyond the traditional definitions found in myths and literary works, showcasing a broader spectrum of characteristics in films and animations.

Through the use of 3D animation technology, cultural archetypes are effectively brought to life, allowing them to seamlessly integrate into the narrative of animations. Although the philosophical differences between China and the West may prevent Western audiences from fully grasping the deeper significance of the Loong as a cultural symbol, the adaptation of the Western Hollywood hero narrative model facilitates the recognition of the Loong archetype by global audiences. Cross-cultural communication has accelerated the transformation of cultural archetype, enabling the loong's image to retain its original symbolic meaning while

also acquiring new connotations and functions. As crosscultural exchanges intensify, the adaptation and transformation of cultural archetypes in modern media have become an inevitable trend. The simplification of these cultural archetype makes them more accessible to global audiences, allowing them to preserve certain traditional elements while aligning with contemporary entertainment trends.

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The Beauty of "Serenity, Taste, and Image": Spatial Reflection in Contemporary Ink Animation

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Abstract

"Serenity, Taste, and Image" embodies Zong Bing's "Theory of Spiritual Resonance," highlighting the aesthetic function of human enjoyment and emphasizing the significance of grasping subjective awareness in aesthetics. Cinematic space can represent and reproduce a story, serving as the narrative's backdrop. However, in many animations, space is fluid and dynamic, granting it unique artistic appeal. This specific spatial movement often reflects the creator's thoughts and experiences in transitions of motion. Using classic cases like *Little Tadpoles Looking for Mama*, *The Shepherd's Flute*, and *Feeling from Mountain and Water*, this paper analyzes how contemporary ink animation constructs a distinct spatial identity for Chinese animation through spatial awareness, spatial reflection, and modern reinterpretation. It reveals the aesthetic mechanism of "using emptiness to bear substance" and "using the virtual to signify the real," ultimately demonstrating the unique aesthetic paradigm formed in Chinese ink animation regarding temporal-spatial transitions and the interplay of the virtual and the real.
Keywords: Serenity and Taste, Ink Animation, Spatial Narration, Aesthetic Characteristics.

The aesthetic concept of "Serenity, Taste, and Image (澄怀味象)" originates from the rich soil of philosophical reflection during the Wei and Jin dynasties. Southern dynasty painter Zong Bing proposed the idea of "Serene Contemplation of the Tao" in *Preface to Landscape Painting*[1]. This concept transforms the philosophical approaches of Zhuangzi's "sitting and forgetting" and Laozi's "purging and profound observation" into specific methodologies for artistic creation. "Serenity" refers to a tranquil and luminous state of mind; "taste" signifies aesthetic enjoyment and pleasure; "image" refers to aesthetic representation. "Serenity, Taste, and Image" embodies Zong Bing's "Theory of Spiritual Resonance," with its core focusing on attaining the authentic essence of nature ("taste and image") through a calm and open mindset ("serenity"). This cognitive path of "conveying the Tao through forms" has been creatively reinterpreted in contemporary Chinese ink animation. The concept prominently emphasizes the aesthetic pleasure function of humans, underscores the importance of grasping the subjective awareness of aesthetics, and advocates liberation from the constraints of practical utility and moral comparison.

I. Spatial Awareness: Translation of the "Three-Distance Method" in Animation

Taking the 1961 Shanghai Animation Film Studio's *Little Tadpoles Looking for Mama* as an example, the opening sequence shows clusters of ink dots swimming, visually embodying the concept of "something arising from nothing" as expressed in Laozi's *Dao De Jing*: "The Dao gives birth to one, one gives birth to two." As the ink dots gradually transform into schools of fish, the negative space created in the blank areas of the composition aligns with Laozi's idea: "Chisel windows and doors to make a room; it is the emptiness inside that makes it useful." By controlling the diffusion rate of ink at 12 frames per second, the animators evoke an aesthetic experience of "images beyond images" as viewers gaze into the blank spaces. This process of "serene contemplation" requires the audience to temporarily suspend their habitual cognitive frameworks, allowing them to perceive the rhythm of life's essence within the flow of ink and brush. The shifting intensity

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of the ink as the tadpoles swim mirrors Laozi's philosophical reflection: "Vague and elusive, yet within it, there is an image." When the ink dots transform into schools of fish, the negative space in the composition creates a "formless form," serving as a visual translation of the indescribable nature of the Dao. Viewers must clear their thoughts (*serene contemplation*) to truly perceive the rhythm of life (*serenity, taste, and image*).

In *The Shepherd's Flute*, the horizontal scroll composition of the cowherd playing the flute while riding an ox reflects Guo Xi's spatial wisdom from the "Three-Distance Method": the nearby willow branches represent "Level Distance" (平远), the middle-ground water buffalo reflects "Deep Distance" (深远), and the distant mountains depict "High Distance" (高远), forming a continuum of time and space. This spatial awareness, described as "inhabitable and wanderable," is further emphasized through dynamic shifts in scatter perspective as the cowherd moves through the bamboo forest, enabling the audience to experience a spiritual journey of "traveling the springs and valleys without leaving the feast."

In the *Lofty Ambitions in Forests and Streams* (林泉高致), Guo Xi of the Northern Song Dynasty introduced the "Three-Distance Method," not only establishing a visual paradigm for landscape painting but also embedding a narrative wisdom unifying time and space. The spatial constructs of the "Three-Distance Method" visually translate the temporal-spatial philosophy of the *Book of Changes* (易经): "High Distance" embodies the robust energy of the *Qian Hexagram* ("Heaven's motion is vigorous"), "Deep Distance" symbolizes the inclusiveness of the *Kun Hexagram* ("Containing grandeur and vastness"), and "Level Distance" aligns with the *Xian Hexagram* ("The interaction of Heaven and Earth gives rise to all living things"). This spatial awareness reaches its pinnacle in Huang Gongwang's *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, where the S-shaped river visually extends the continuum of time and space, guiding the viewer's gaze along the water's flow through a complete time sequence from dawn to dusk, achieving the temporal transcendence described in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*: "Silent and contemplative, thoughts connect across millennia." In Lin Hun's animated film *Fog Hill of Five Elements*, the opening 7-minute long take dynamically deconstructs the vertical space of Fan Kuan's *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*: the camera ascends slowly from the foggy mountainside ("Level Distance"), through cascading waterfalls and deep ravines ("Deep Distance"), ultimately reaching the summit of the main peak ("High Distance"). This "bottom-up" visual motion forms a spatial continuum. Using real-time rendering technology, the animators transform the traditional "Three-Distance Method" into a physically immersive depth, enabling viewers to achieve spiritual transcendence akin to "traveling springs and valleys without leaving the feast." Even more groundbreaking, Fog Hill of Five Elements innovatively spatializes philosophical concepts by aligning the elements of metal, wood, water, fire, and earth with different spatial dimensions: the metallic sword energy enhances the sublime nature of "High Distance" with vertical depth, while water-based attacks expand the extensiveness of "Level Distance" through horizontal ripples. This attempt to spatialize philosophical ideas elevates Guo Xi's "Three-Distance" theory from a static compositional rule to a dynamic narrative grammar.

II. Spatial Reflection in the Tradition of Chinese Aesthetics

Zong Bing's concept of "Serenity, Taste, and Image," proposed in Preface to Landscape Painting, is a brilliant crystallization of the metaphysical thought trends during the Wei and Jin dynasties in the realm of art. The foundation of this idea can be traced back to Zhuangzi's philosophy in *The World of Humans*: "The Dao gathers in emptiness; emptiness is the fasting of the mind." Zong Bing transformed Zhuangzi's approach of "awaiting things in emptiness" into an aesthetic vision for landscape imagery, requiring the subject to purge utilitarian thoughts and embrace the authentic nature of the world with a serene state of mind. As Ji Kang remarked in *On the Non-Sorrow of Sound*: "Harmonious sound lacks form, but sorrowful hearts hold substance." Artistic creation is not merely a simple reproduction of objects but a spiritual ritual that conveys meaning through form.

In the animated film *Feeling from Mountain and Water*, the scene where the old musician plays the

guqin by the riverside perfectly manifests the state of "Serene Contemplation." The frequency of the guqin's vibrating strings resonates with the ripples of flowing water, while the gradual transition of ink tones from dense to light corresponds to the transformative philosophy of *The Book of Changes*: "Knowing transformation through the extremes of spirit." When the boy takes over the guqin, the frame suddenly freezes in blankness—this "painting without painting" visually interprets Wang Bi's concept of "attaining meaning and forgetting form." Only by dissolving concrete images can one perceive the cosmic rhythm of "great sound is rare." This spatial treatment of "using emptiness to activate substance" transforms the Daoist cosmology of "mutual arising of being and non-being" into a tangible aesthetic experience.

Shi Tao's "Single Brushstroke Theory" reinterprets the spatiotemporal nature of brush and ink through the Zen perspective of "one is all." In his *Drafting Sketches After Exhausting Every Mountain Peak*, the seemingly casual use of dry brushstrokes and shading embodies the Zen concept of "a moment is eternity"—each stroke serves both as a unit of spatial construction and as a trace of temporal flow. This philosophy finds dynamic expression in the animated film *The Shepherd's Flute*: as the cowherd crosses the bamboo forest riding an ox, the falling speed of bamboo leaves synchronizes with the rhythm of the flute, evoking a sense of spatial and temporal stillness reminiscent of the timeless tranquility in *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams*. This hidden resonance reflects Shao Yong's rationalist concept of "observing objects through objects."

Ink animation, as a "moving philosophical scroll," fundamentally reconstructs traditional methods of observing objects in a dynamic form. Fei Mu's theory of "wandering observation" is demonstrated as a unique visual grammar in *Little Tadpoles Looking for Mama*: the camera shifts horizontally like an unfolding handscroll, with the swimming paths of tadpoles creating a Tai Chi-like spatial loop. This motion pattern serves as both the cinematic embodiment of Gu Kaizhi's principle of "transcendent thought yielding marvelous realization" and Dong Qichang's idea that "clouds in paintings all derive their vitality from the dynamic." Animation activates the "qi" (life force) within ink painting through the dimension of time.

In the fire scenes of *Fog Hill of Five Elements*, the wild brushstrokes and blank spaces form Tai Chi imagery, illustrating "yin within yang, yang within yin." The spreading flames no longer follow physical rules but unfold according to the hexagram logic of *The Book of Changes*: "Li represents fire." The dominant red tone symbolizes "the summer of the southern lands," while jagged edges correspond to "Xun as wind." Through decomposition and recomposition of traditional motifs, the animation medium transforms the mode of "observing objects and taking images" into dynamic visual enlightenment. On a deeper level, this translation reconstructs the experience field of "harmony between heaven and humanity." When audiences gaze at the swirling ink vortices in *Deep Sea*, their breathing rhythm unconsciously adjusts to the movement of the particles. This phenomenon of physical and mental resonance embodies the idea from *The Record of Music*: "Great music harmonizes with heaven and earth." Animation amplifies the meditative qualities of ink painting through temporal and spatial extension, turning the process of "serenity, taste, and image" into a ritual connecting individual life with cosmic spirit.

From Zong Bing's "Serene Contemplation of the Tao" to contemporary ink animation, Chinese art consistently upholds the spiritual pursuit of "conveying the Tao through art." In the age of technological acceleration, this pursuit offers aesthetic redemption in response to the "mechanical reproduction era." When the grass insect in the 8K ink animation Harvest hesitates among withered leaves, the trembling of its finely detailed antennae pays homage to Qi Baishi's notion that "the charm of painting lies between likeness and unlikeness," while simultaneously presenting a visual reflection of Zhuangzi's proposition from *Autumn Floods*: "You are not a fish." Through dynamic spatial narratives, the animation medium breathes new life into ancient wisdom within the contemporary context, providing humanity with a path to transcend material appearances and directly reach the essence of existence.

III. The Flowing Charm of Ink: The Spatial Narrative Mechanism of Ink Animation

In *The Shepherd's Flute*, the narrative thread of the cowherd searching for his ox is deconstructed into three spatial dimensions: the foreground, defined by solid lines, conveys the cowherd's anxious body language; the middle ground, rendered with wet brushstrokes, depicts the realistic depth of the bamboo forest; and the background, characterized by flying-white brushwork, hints at the pastoral scenery in the cowherd's memory. This composite composition of "Level Distance + Deep Distance" perfectly demonstrates the spatial principle of "planning and positioning" from Xie He's *Six Principles of Painting*. When the cowherd leans against a tree and plays his flute, the frame transitions into the "memory layer"—the outlines of oxen, gradually emerging in light ink, form a visual interplay of reality and void with the bamboo shadows in the foreground. This is a visual presentation of the "metadiegetic level" from Genette's theory of narrative layers. Even more ingenious is the introduction of a third "imaginary space": the waterfall the cowherd dreams of leaping over. Here, the brushstrokes shift from the traditional *pima cun* texture strokes to Zhang Daqian's splashed colors, instantly elevating the spatial dimension from physical reality to the spiritual realm. These three narrative layers are not linearly stacked but topologically transformed through varying ink densities—the ink stains on the cowherd's garment are both sweat from reality and cowbells from memory, ultimately transcending into stars in the realm of imagination. This spatial weaving reflects the creative philosophy from *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*: "The spirit roams with objects," transforming the aesthetic pursuit of "vivid spirit and movement" into a dynamic spatial narrative grammar.

In *Feeling from Mountain and Water*, the climactic scene of the guqin master teaching his craft represents one of the most exquisite uses of blank space in the history of Chinese animation. When the boy's fingers touch the guqin strings, the frame suddenly transitions into "negative space": the sound of the guqin transforms into ink droplets splashing onto silk, gradually forming mountain outlines in the blank spaces. This "using white as black" technique pushes Wolfgang Iser's "structure of appeal" theory to its zenith—viewers must use their imagination to fill in the absent contours of the landscape, reconstructing the artistic conception of "great sound is rare" in their minds. Xie He's principle of "assigning color according to the type" is subverted here: color is not applied based on the object's appearance but left blank according to emotional needs.

The animators deliberately leave the boy's face in an unfinished line-drawing state, creating a blank-space imagery reminiscent of the "upturned blank eyes" in Bada Shanren's works. As the master and apprentice part ways, the blank area of the river gradually reveals the brushstrokes of *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*. This "absent presence" forces the audience to project emotions at the intersection of reality and void. As Dong Qichang remarked, "Void and substance give rise to one another; even unpainted spaces are marvelous realms." The blank space in ink animation is not only a spatial strategy but also a catalyst for producing meaning, elevating "vivid spirit and movement" from a technical standard to a philosophical proposition.

Little Tadpoles Looking for Mama innovatively translates Qi Baishi's aesthetic principle of "the charm lies between likeness and unlikeness" into animation grammar. The swimming paths of the tadpoles follow the "Z-shaped" composition from *The Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting* while resonating with the poetic rhythm of Du Fu's "In light rain, fish appear." As the tadpoles pass through the water plants, the ink suddenly transitions from dense to light, shifting the spatial dimension from the tangible pond to the poetic realm of "the grass appears green from afar but not up close." This method of translation affirms Wei-lim Yip's notion of "mystic resonance"—animated time and space are no longer physical containers but resonant fields of poetic imagery. Especially in the sequence where the tadpoles search for their frog mother, the gathering and dispersing of ink dots form a dynamic "poetic montage": the vibration frequencies of the tadpoles' tails engage in a cross-temporal dialogue with the bold brushstrokes of Xu Wei's floral paintings; the flying-white strokes of the lotus leaves evoke the Zen-like spatiality of Wang Wei's "After fresh rains in the empty mountains." This temporal-spatial construction of "poetry and painting as one" offers a contemporary interpretation of Xie He's principle of "transmitting and modeling"—not as mechanical reproduction of objects but as a dynamic reconstruction of cultural memory[2].

V. The Interplay of Reality and Illusion: Three Dimensions of Modern Transformation

The contemporary ink animation *Harvest* utilizes 8K technology to construct a dynamic ink-rhyme system, transforming Bada Shanren's aesthetics of "more ink dots, more tears" into digital particle movement. Each ink droplet is imbued with unique physical properties: when depicting the fluttering of an autumn cicada's wings, tens of thousands of ink particles move according to aerodynamic principles, creating effects reminiscent of Huang Binhong's "accumulated ink" in his "Five Shades and Seven Inks" technique. This technological breakthrough offers a new interpretation of Xie He's *Six Principles of Painting*—"correspondence to the object." Digital algorithms not only simulate the shape of objects but also capture the "qi" (life force) trajectory of biological motion. In the 2021 Venice Biennale's Chinese Pavilion, the installation *Ink Universe* used a quantum ink system driven by real-time brainwave data to alter the intensity of ink tones. When viewers gazed at the blank canvas, alpha brainwaves activated the self-organizing movement of ink particles, dynamically forming *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains* in the void. This "viewer-creating-scene" interactive model transforms traditional "blank space" into a neuro-aesthetic field, realizing a trans-temporal dialogue between Shi Tao's "Single Brushstroke Theory" and digitally generated art.

In cross-media experiments, the creative philosophy of Japan's TeamLab's *Forest of Resonating Lamps* resonates with Chinese new media artist Liu Jiayu's installation *Ultimate Void and Tranquility*. When viewers walk through a digital ink bamboo forest, sensory devices trigger ripple-like topological diffusion of ink tones. This spatial interaction mechanism echoes Guo Xi's *Lofty Ambitions in Forests and Streams*: "Some landscapes can be traveled, some can be observed, and some can be explored."

In *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, the sequence where Taiyi Zhenren opens the *Mountains and Rivers State Painting* creatively transforms the traditional ink scroll into a three-dimensional space. This scene garnered over a million "Eastern mysticism" comments on YouTube, highlighting the cross-cultural acceptance of Homi Bhabha's hybridity in "third space" theory. The animators deconstructed the monumental composition of Fan Kuan's *Travelers Among Mountains and Streams* into a traversable particle space. As *Ne Zha* flew over the ink mountains on his flaming wheels, his trajectory adhered to Western perspective principles while retaining the observational logic of Chinese *Three Distances*. This "neither purely Eastern nor purely Western" spatial construction fosters new mechanisms of meaning production in cultural collisions, achieving an ontological breakthrough for traditional media in the digital age.

In architecture, Wang Shu's design of the Xiangshan Campus at the China Academy of Art translates the spatial philosophy of ink painting into physical structures. The complex dissolves fixed viewpoints through a "scattered perspective" layout, while "flying-white" styled windows at corridor turns create flowing connections between interior and exterior spaces, reminiscent of *A Thousand Miles of Rivers and Mountains*. This spatial practice parallels the narrative logic of the cowherd traversing multiple ink dimensions in *The Shepherd's Flute*. More innovatively, the Dutch architectural team MVRDV's *Ink City* project deconstructs Shenzhen's urban villages into parameterized ink models, visualizing the growth trajectory of illegal structures through algorithms, unexpectedly revealing the "ecological unconsciousness" in urbanization processes.

The modern transformation of ink animation represents a triple breakthrough in materiality, culture, and ecology. In the digital rebirth of ink particles, we see the renewal of the creation philosophy in The *Kaogong Ji*: "Heaven has time, Earth has qi, material has beauty, and work has skill"—now manifesting on the quantum level. In cross-cultural hybrid spaces, Shi Tao's declaration "brush and ink must follow the times" finds new interpretation in a global context. In the reconstruction of ecological aesthetics, Guo Xi's "spirit of forests and streams" intersects with deep ecology, offering an Eastern solution to modern spatial alienation. This transformation is not a simple transplant of media but, as Gombrich put it, "the self-renewal of the image cosmos"—a creative reorganization of Chinese civilization's genes in the digital era. As ink particles flow freely in virtual space, they carry not only an aesthetic tradition but also the cultural codes for redefining humanity's spatial cognition.

In the digital age, the spatial narrative mechanism of ink animation is undergoing a genetic mutation. In *White Snake: Origin* (2018), the alternate space of "Baoqing Workshop" transforms traditional blank space into particle effects, with the density of ink tones deconstructed into variations in data streams. This transformation is not a betrayal of tradition but a rebirth of the *Book of Changes'* philosophy of "change" within digital media. As viewers traverse mountains and rivers composed of ink particles, they experience the aesthetic realm described in *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*: "Silent and contemplative, thoughts connect across millennia." Emerging algorithmic ink art encodes "vivid spirit and movement" into mathematical formulas. In *I Am What I Am*, the opening ink segment depicts the trajectory of lion dance movements, generating ink brushstrokes in real-time. Each motion vector corresponds to the *Monk Bitter Melon's Art Commentary* principle of "Single Brushstroke Theory," emphasizing "drawing on the past to innovate for the present" and "I am myself, unique in existence." This cross-media transformation elevates Xie He's *Six Principles of Painting*—from "bone method in brushwork" as wrist movement to algorithmic logic. Traditional spatial narratives gain new interpretations in the era of artificial intelligence.

V. Conclusion

Under the term "animation," technology provides abundant resources for rethinking how films represent existence in space. Animation explores spatial dimensions in diverse ways. The examples discussed here reflect a reconsideration of the boundaries of spatial attributes in animation, blending narrative with space and character development. Whether these spaces are open or closed, they are always filled with tension. Thus, space in animation becomes a complex object that can emerge in various forms.

Animation not only showcases space during the production process but also revitalizes the spatial properties of cinema, detaching it from predetermined settings and locations. As noted in film studies, while we are highly aware of the temporality brought by moving images, spatiality remains a domain yet to be fully explored. Gaston Bachelard, in his studies, emphasized the simple imagery of spaces of happiness, aiming to uncover the humanistic values of space. Space carries empirical protective value alongside its dominant imaginative value. As space grasped by imagination, it is no longer the cold, indifferent entity governed by measurement and geometrical thinking[i,3].

From the three-tiered space of *The Shepherd's Flute* to the particle universe in *White Snake: Origin*, Chinese ink animation continuously explores the possibilities of "space as a cultural carrier." This pursuit is both a creative transformation of Xie He's *Six Principles of Painting* and a contemporary response to Qi Baishi's notion that "the charm of painting lies between likeness and unlikeness." As ink rhyme flows freely in digital space, it reveals not only technological innovation but also the eternal vitality of the Chinese aesthetic spirit, encapsulated by the idea that "Though Zhou is an ancient state, its mandate is renewed." In this sense, the spatial narrative of ink animation has transcended formal boundaries, becoming a dynamic manifestation of the genetic essence of Chinese civilization.

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i. Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962), a French philosopher, scientist, and poet, explores the phenomenology and symbolism of space in The Poetics of Space. He develops a poetic vision of dwelling, examining imagery like homes, drawers, boxes, cabinets, bird nests, shells, corners, miniatures, and circles. Space, for Bachelard, is not merely a material container but a vessel for human consciousness and a haven for happiness.

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Acknowledgments

The Historical Evolution of Oriental Aesthetics in Animated Films and the Contemporary Context of Returning to Oriental Aesthetics

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Abstract

This article focuses on the Oriental aesthetics in Chinese animated films, outlining its historical evolution and contextual background. Before 1941, under the overarching themes of national revival and political circumstances, Chinese animation began its journey under challenging conditions, characterized by a conscious effort in exploration. Between 1955 and 1999, Oriental aesthetics deeply integrated into animation creation, blending Oriental philosophical thought to form a unique style. After a brief downturn, Oriental aesthetics saw a resurgence after 2015, against the backdrop of declining Western centrism and media convergence. At different historical stages, Oriental aesthetics in Chinese animated films exhibited distinct characteristics, playing a significant role in cultural inheritance and international communication through development and innovation.

Keywords: animated films; Oriental aesthetics; aesthetics

Animation, as a unique art form carrying cultural attributes, serves not only as a medium of entertainment but also as an important vehicle for cultural transmission and aesthetic expression. From the early exploration of animation at the beginning of the 20th century to the development and innovation of Oriental aesthetics across various historical periods after the founding of the People's Republic of China and the Reform and Opening-up policy, Oriental aesthetics have been integral to the progression of Chinese animated films. This aesthetic has become a significant hallmark distinguishing them from Western animation.In the current era of rapid global development in the film industry, research on Oriental aesthetics in animated films offers valuable historical insights for the development of the animation industry today. A deeper understanding of its internal artistic logic can help uncover the cultural roots of Chinese animated films, thereby providing feasible paths to enhance their international influence.

From its inception to its thriving development today, Chinese animation has undergone a journey of early exploration, aesthetic maturity, and innovative resurgence. This trajectory vividly reflects the social outlook, cultural demands, and aesthetic preferences of different eras. Therefore, the study of Oriental aesthetics in animated films should not be isolated to the art form itself but examined within the broader historical context, exploring its evolution, driving factors, and cultural value across various time periods.

I. The Beginning of 'Oriental Aesthetics': The Conscious Exploration of Animation Aesthetics Before 1941

1.1 Overview of the Origins and Early Development of Chinese Animation

In the early 20th century, animation, a new artistic form, was introduced to China from the United States. According to newspaper records, "In the eighth year of the Republic of China, after movies spread to Shanghai, cartoons followed suit."[1] The introduction of animation and its artistic marvels captivated Chinese audiences, quickly establishing its place in urban entertainment culture. It also attracted China's first generation of animation pioneers, including Wan Laiming, Wan Guchan, Wan Chaochen, Wan Dihuan (the Wan

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brothers), Yang Zuota, and Huang Linong, to embark on the creative exploration of early Chinese animation. Wan Guchan once recalled: "In the early 1920s, the animated films (then called cartoon films) newly introduced to China caught our brothers' attention... For me, seeing animated films evoked feelings similar to when I first saw shadow puppetry as a child—an emotion that lingered."

Thus began the era of Chinese domestic animation. Despite the simplicity of equipment and limited funds, Chinese animators worked under difficult external conditions to create China's earliest batch of animated works. Representative pieces include *Pause* (1923) and *New Year* (1924) by Yang Zuota, *A Dog Invites Guests* (1924) by Huang Linong, and *Shuzhendong Chinese Typewriter* (1925), *Uproar in the Studio* (1926), and *Paper Boy's Pranks* (1930) by the Wan brothers. During this initial stage of Chinese animation, the pioneers' creations were predominantly imitative of foreign animation, forming a lively and humorous visual style through exploration and learning. These works were relatively simple in imagery and had straightforward narratives, appealing mainly through their novelty and entertainment value. In 1935, China's first sound animation, *Camel Dance* by the Wan brothers, marked the beginning of the maturity phase of early Chinese animation. The addition of sound infused animation with new vitality and expressiveness, making animated characters more vivid and narratives more impactful. Additionally, during the 1930s, Japan's imperialist invasion of China led to a shift in animation themes from entertaining and humorous styles of the 1920s to politically charged works advocating resistance and national salvation. This period saw the emergence of films like *A History of National Pain* (1933), *Resistance* (1935), *Slogans for the War of Resistance* (1936), and *The New Tide* (1936). Compared to entertainment-oriented works of the 1920s like *Uproar in the Studio and Paper Boy's Pranks*, animations in this era carried educational and revolutionary significance, serving as "deafeningly impactful propaganda and calls to action."[3]

From the birth of China's first batch of animated films in the early 1920s to the release of China's landmark first black-and-white animated feature film, *Princess Iron Fan*, in the 1940s, Chinese animation underwent nearly two decades of evolution. This journey witnessed progress from silent to sound animation, from advertising shorts to narrative feature films, and the exploration of Oriental aesthetics transitioned from a spontaneous to a conscious effort.

1.2 The Era Motives Behind the Conscious Exploration of Oriental Aesthetics

In the first half of the 20th century, after enduring the corruption of the late Qing dynasty and the exploitation and oppression of imperialism, the Oriental nations experienced significant upheavals. Numerous patriotic figures dedicated themselves to awakening the national spirit, leading to the gradual formation of the conscious entity of the Chinese nation amidst hardships. In 1902, Liang Qichao, in his *Renewing the People* (Xin Min Shuo), called for the awakening of the Chinese people: "In today's era of nations standing side by side, where the strong prey on the weak, and the fittest survive, lacking such qualifications will lead to having no means of establishing oneself in the world."[4] This call marked the prelude to the rolling waves of national revival in the Chinese soil of the 20th century. Following the Xinhai Revolution, terms like "Chinese nation" and "China" were widely propagated and applied, signaling the awakening of national consciousness. The tide of national revival thus became a profound driving force for the conscious exploration of Oriental aesthetics in Chinese animation.

Since the 1920s, Western animations were screened exclusively in China, with Hollywood dominating the animation market. Representative works such as Otto Messmer's *Felix the Cat* and the Fleischer Brothers' *Out of the Inkwell* held significant influence, and key animation production technologies were monopolized by Europe and America. Chinese domestic animation creation faced the challenges of technological monopoly and starting from scratch, making it difficult to secure a place in the animation market at the time. According to the Wan brothers' recollections, foreign technological blockades once sparked an even stronger sense of patriotic nationalism in them, leading them to "determine to devote their youth to creating Chinese artistic films, to make the Chinese nation proud and to prevent foreigners from monopolizing the beauty."[5] The animators'

strong patriotic fervor and awareness of national revival were crucial motives that nurtured the growth of animation as an artistic form on Chinese soil and led to the exploration of Oriental aesthetics.

Moreover, the drastic changes in the times influenced animation creation. After the 1930s, the enduring flames of the Anti-Japanese War made animators realize the need for animation to shoulder the responsibilities of promoting resistance against aggression and advocating democracy. With the land shattered and foreign enemies rampant, the art community of the time saw a proliferation of anti-aggression-themed films, advertisements, and slogans. As the Wan brothers stated: "As soon as animated films appeared in China, their themes diverged from those in the West. In suffering China, we have no time for jokes; we must awaken our compatriots."[6] Chinese animation creation thus embarked on a path of artistic integration with political themes, awakening the masses with powerful works imbued with national characteristics and local aesthetics.

1.3 The Budding and Diverse Representation of Oriental Aesthetics

Before 1941, Chinese animators had not yet developed a systematic methodology based on Oriental aesthetics, and early works were marked by imitation and borrowing from the West. Nevertheless, Oriental aesthetics had already begun to emerge consciously in these early animations, exhibiting a rich atmosphere of Oriental beauty and showcasing abundant elements of Oriental culture across various dimensions of the works.

Firstly, in terms of subject matter, the pioneers of animation frequently drew inspiration from folk tales and mythological legends, combining the context of the times with Western animation techniques to achieve the principle of "adopting the West for use by China." For instance, works like *Wu Song Fights the Tiger* (1923), *New Year* (1924), and *Flowers in the Mirror* (1925) were based on traditional Chinese stories and literature. As the first black-and-white feature-length animated film in China and Asia, *Princess Iron Fan* (1941) drew content from the Chinese classical novel *Journey to the West*. The story, involving the protagonists borrowing the Banana Leaf Fan three times from the Flaming Mountain, symbolized the unity of Chinese people in resisting aggression and eliminating imperialist invasions, reflecting the great spirit of the era.

Secondly, in terms of character design, animation during this period aimed to integrate Chinese elements into its characters. According to a July 16, 1927 issue of *Shenbao*, "The chubby baby figures in *Uproar in the Studio and Paper Boy's Pranks* incorporated traditional Chinese elements, such as small braided horns and bellybands, showcasing distinct national styles and regional features."[7] For instance, in the sound animation *Young Yue Fei* (1936), the Wan brothers adopted meticulous techniques from traditional Chinese painting, emphasizing fine lines to achieve a realistic proportion of characters, rather than the exaggerated and distorted styles characteristic of Western animation.

Finally, in terms of the visual and auditory representation of Oriental aesthetics, this stage featured multiple explorations and experiments. In their animation created for the anti-war song *Man Jiang Hong* (1938), the Wan brothers used ink-and-wash landscapes as the backdrop, projecting the contemporary reality of national peril onto Yue Fei's duel with Japanese samurai. This blended the grandeur of ink-and-wash aesthetics with a cross-temporal dialogue between the past and present. During Shanghai's "solitary island" period, *Princess Iron Fan* (1941) incorporated stylistic elements of Chinese landscape painting into its artistic design, using scenes with Oriental charm like mountains, flowing water, pagodas, and flying eaves. In terms of sound design, China's first sound animation, *Camel Dance* (1935), adopted the drumming effects of Peking Opera for the depiction of the camel's dance, while flute sounds were used for the camel's tumbling actions. This marked the beginning of applying Oriental sound design in animation. Moreover, songs like *The Song of Journey* and *The Song of Treasure in Princess Iron Fan* (1941) showcased elements of Chinese traditional opera, combining lively music rhythms with techniques such as "singing," "reciting," "acting," and "fighting," presenting a unique Oriental aesthetic.

In summary, Oriental aesthetics and nationalist thoughts had already begun to sprout and enter a conscious stage of exploration during this period, laying the initial foundation for future animation creation. As

Wan Laiming stated in his 1936 essay *Idle Talk on Cartoons*: "To ensure the unlimited vitality of China's animation industry, it must take root in its own national traditions."[8] This served as both an inspiration and a prophecy, suggesting that Chinese animated films were destined to diverge from the path of "American giant Walt Disney" and forge their own unique road[9].

II. The Maturity of 'Oriental Aesthetics': The Historical Styles of Animation Aesthetics from 1955 to 1999

2.1 The Refinement and Application of Traditional Cultural Elements

From 1955 to 1999, Chinese animated works deeply refined and extensively applied traditional cultural elements, establishing a unique Oriental aesthetic style. During this period, animations such as *Little Tadpoles Looking for Their Mother* (1960) and *The Shepherd's Flute* (1963) adopted traditional ink-and-wash painting techniques. By balancing "similarity and dissimilarity," these works embodied the interplay of realism and abstraction, showcasing the distinctive charm of ink-and-wash animation. The success of ink-and-wash animation stemmed not only from the precise use of such techniques but also from integrating the emotional resonance and artistic conception of traditional Chinese aesthetics, allowing viewers to experience the profound depth of Chinese cultural heritage while enjoying the animation. Meanwhile, paper-cutting art was widely employed in animation creation. Works such as *Pigsy Eats Watermelon* (1958) and *The Golden Conch* (1963) utilized the intricate craftsmanship of "carving," "engraving," "cutting," and "trimming," revealing the unique appeal of paper-cutting animation. These animations not only preserved the traditional techniques of paper-cutting art but also innovated in character design and scene creation to better align with the aesthetic preferences of modern audiences.

Regarding character and scene design, the works from this period fully exhibited the features of Oriental aesthetics. In character design, creators drew from the imagery in traditional Chinese arts, such as opera masks and New Year paintings, incorporating these elements into animated characters to form distinct Oriental animation styles. For instance, the Ginseng Baby character in *Ginseng Baby* (1961) was heavily influenced by the visual style of New Year painting figures, making it a favorite among audiences. In scene composition, animation creators borrowed techniques and artistic expressions from traditional Chinese painting, such as landscape and bird-and-flower paintings, to create settings with strong Oriental characteristics. For example, the distant fields in *The Carp Jumps Over the Dragon Gate* (1958) adopted the style of Chinese landscape painting, embedding the beauty of traditional artistic conception into animated scenes and enriching the viewing experience with a touch of Chinese painting's charm.

Additionally, folklore provided a rich source of material for animation creation. For example, *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King* (1979), adapted from the Investiture of the Gods, reinterpreted the "Nezha" character, which first appeared in Havoc in Heaven (1961). While the earlier film presented Nezha as an antagonist with a design influenced by Wuxi clay figurines and temple murals, Nezha Conquers the Dragon King delved deeper into traditional cultural themes. In designing Nezha's appearance, Zhang Ding, who contributed to the film's art direction, drew inspiration from traditional Chinese door-god paintings and murals, employing folk art's commonly used colors, such as green, red, blue, black, and white. This process resulted in a fresh yet familiar aesthetic[10]. The film borrowed traditional cultural elements extensively in its character designs, scene compositions, and key narrative props. For instance, the mystical red ribbons depicted in the film were inspired by the flowing, ethereal beauty of divine figures in Gu Kaizhi's *Admonitions of the Instructress to the Palace Ladies* from the Eastern Jin dynasty[11]. The design of the *Hun Tian Ling* (Heavenly Silk Ribbon) cleverly integrated lightness and flexibility, harmonizing with the traditional figure-painting style. The deep traditional essence behind these animations reflected the strong support and influence of Chinese national culture[12]. By integrating Oriental aesthetics, these animations vividly revitalized traditional stories and allowed audiences to appreciate the charm of Chinese culture and local artistic expression.

2.2 The Integration of Narrative Styles and Oriental Philosophical Thought

During this period, the narrative techniques in animated works were deeply influenced by Oriental philosophical thought, such as Daoist concepts of nature and Confucian views on ethics, both of which were reflected in the storytelling. Through fables and myths, creators integrated these philosophies into their animation plots, enabling viewers to appreciate the profound insights of Oriental philosophy while enjoying the films. For instance, the adaptation of traditional themes aligned with the spirit of the times and the creation of heroic characters through conflicts were key features of these animations. Confucian cultural figures, like sage kings and gentlemen, were brought to life in arts such as novels and operas, eventually becoming cultural symbols. Iconic examples include Sun Wukong's rebellious spirit in *Havoc in Heaven* and Nezha's fearless defiance of tyranny in *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King*[13]. Heroes, whether historically celebrated, real, or fictional, serve as representations of universal human values, collective aspirations, and unique individual qualities. They become cultural symbols through timeless narratives and embody the essence of cultural imagery[13]. Beyond these widely recognized hero figures, smaller-scale heroes also stood out in animations like *Three Monks* (1981). In this story, the young, slim, and chubby monks collaboratively extinguish a fire in the temple, becoming heroic figures in their own right. The moral core of such characters centers around "benevolence," which encompasses individual education, handling human relationships, and maintaining social structures. The transformation of the monks from isolated individuals to a united team working in harmony exemplifies the theme of "benevolence" behind the film's message. Their mutual respect, cooperation, and collective effort represent ideals of harmonious social relationships and structures. The infusion of Oriental philosophy into character creation extends beyond mainstream heroes to include individualized, niche figures, vividly portrayed to enrich storytelling within Chinese animation.

Additionally, on the foundation of adapting stories from local Chinese art forms, creators absorbed the essence of ancient and modern artistic traditions[14]. For example, director A Da utilized comic language alongside animation techniques, using seemingly casual humor to emphasize the importance of teamwork and embody Confucian ideals of harmony. The visual compositions and plot designs in the films also cleverly incorporated Oriental aesthetic elements, allowing viewers to experience the allure of Oriental philosophy while watching the animations.In summary, from 1955 to 1999, Chinese animated works achieved remarkable success in integrating Oriental aesthetics and localizing animation art. Through the refinement and application of traditional cultural elements, the creation of Oriental-style characters and scenes, and the fusion of philosophical thought, these works not only showcased distinctive Oriental aesthetics but also made significant contributions to the development of global animation art.

III. The Return of 'Oriental Aesthetics': The Context of Animation Aesthetics and Aesthetic Innovation After 2015

Since the 21st century, the transition of the film medium to television and the influx of foreign animation production companies have led to a gradual brain drain in China's animation industry. The impact of foreign films on the market and the prevalence of imitation resulted in a period of confusion for Chinese animation. For instance, controversies arose due to the lack of national identity in animations such as *I'm Crazy About Song* (2001) and *The Mobis Ring* (2006). The release of *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* (2015) marked a significant turning point, reshaping classic mythology through a modern lens and initiating trends such as "Chinese cultural revival" and grassroots audience support. This phenomenon was not only a response to the inevitable development of globalization and the formation of a multicultural landscape but also a call from audiences for a return to Oriental aesthetics and the rise of domestic animation.

3.1 The Context for the Return of Oriental Aesthetics After 2015
3.1.1 Constructing Cultural Identity under Western Centrism

Western centrism, which emerged around the 19th century, has long imposed ideological and cultural hegemony on the East, leading to marginalization. Raymond Williams introduced the concept of "cultural hegemony," which permeates various domains like art, culture, and education. This phenomenon further exacerbates the marginalization of indigenous cultures in developing countries. "Western countries like the United States use mediums such as film and gaming to implement ideological output, predominantly spreading Western values, lifestyles, and political ideas, potentially diluting the national consciousness and cultural concepts of other nations."[15] However, with the rise of globalization, multicultural development, and the emergence of Third World countries in the 21st century, the original cultural structure of the world has begun to disintegrate, and the decline of Western centrism has become an inevitable historical outcome. The construction of Oriental cultural identity and the fight for cultural discourse globally have become the call of the times and a necessity for national empowerment. As American cultural critic Fredric Jameson points out, the challenge of globalization lies in the standardization of world culture. The exploration of localized aesthetics and the awareness of cultural survival are vital forces in opposing national nihilism and emphasizing national identity.

From the perspective of cultural identity construction, deep cultural recognition is fluid and constitutes an "imagined community" based on symbolic systems. Cultural products and media, as critical parts of the symbolic system, play an indispensable role in establishing a nation's standing in the global multicultural framework. In the context of the new era, constructing Oriental cultural identity has become increasingly urgent, placing higher demands on animation creators. Contemporary animators should actively explore the application and innovation of Oriental aesthetics in modern times, promoting and preserving excellent Chinese traditional culture with the spirit of Oriental aesthetics. With "cultural confidence," they can face the development of a global multicultural framework and create outstanding works that embody Chinese aesthetics.

3.1.2 The Spillover of Animation Boundaries in the Process of Media Integration

Beyond the revival of Oriental culture under globalization, the trend of deep media integration is another significant context of the era. With the rapid advancement of digital technology and the globalization wave, the boundaries of traditional media have increasingly blurred. Transformations in content production, distribution channels, and terminal displays have brought profound impacts to the cultural and creative industries. Various media forms are intersecting, integrating, and interacting. The content, channels, platforms, and operational models of traditional and emerging media are being consolidated, shaping new communication dynamics and market ecosystems. Media has evolved from being singular to multi-faceted and linear dissemination to multi-threaded network interaction.

Animation, as a media system primarily based on visual imagery, is greatly influenced by emerging media forms and the overarching trend of media integration. Its modes of delivery, production techniques, and methods of expression are all undergoing significant changes, with production, distribution, and consumption patterns gradually shifting. The original boundaries of media are spilling over, leading to various new forms. Traditional constraints have been broken, continuously expanding and reshaping the limits of animation, such as the emergence of interactivity and participation. The advent of blockchain, 5G communication, and the Web3.0 era has ushered in paradigm shifts in dissemination. Under the tide of the times, animation can no longer rely on the traditional media logic for independent development. It needs to adapt to new trends through cross-media interaction and integration. The era of media integration provides opportunities for innovation and cultural inheritance in Chinese animation. As a vehicle for diverse cross-cultural communication, animation holds the dual mission of enhancing cultural resonance and spreading effectivity. How to preserve the essence of traditional culture, recreate national classics, and meet the needs of modern technological development and global cultural competition—while exploring pathways for nationalized animation progress from the perspective of media integration—is of significant practical and theoretical value.

3.2 Aesthetic Innovation and the Upgrading of the Animation Industry After 2015

3.2.1 The Impact of Technological Innovation on Animation Aesthetics

Technological innovation has been a crucial driving force behind the advancement of animation aesthetics. In recent years, with the continuous development of advanced technologies such as computer graphics and virtual reality, the visual quality and effects of animation works have been significantly improved. These technologies not only enrich the expressive techniques of animation but also provide a broader stage for the articulation of Oriental aesthetics. For instance, the widespread application of styles like ink-wash effects and particle-based ink rendering in animation has brought a more delicate and vibrant presentation of Oriental aesthetics on the visual level. Moreover, these technologies offer animation creators greater freedom and imaginative space, driving continuous innovation and evolution in animation aesthetics.

Marshall McLuhan's perspective highlights that the material and technological aspects of media are more important than the information and symbolic content they convey. Media technology primarily shapes society through its forms rather than its transmitted content, aiming at "enhancement" as a priority[16]. Looking at the evolution of animation, it has progressed from a simple visual art to a richly integrated sensory experience combining visuals, sound, and narrative. From early singular animation mechanisms to today's computational advancements brought by the digital era, technological upgrades have expanded the definition of animation itself, adapting to its evolving application contexts. In the era of AIGC (Artificial Intelligence Generated Content), innovative productivity tools are propelling animation forward, intertwined with demands for media evolution and technological progress. As new technologies continue to develop, animation film technology has progressed from its first phase during the inception of cinema to its third phase—the era of intelligent cinema.

While technical advancements enhance sensory experiences, domestic animated films, as an integral branch of the film industry, continuously explore development paths that align with national and contemporary needs amidst technological revolutions[17]. Modern animation creation has gained new vitality through diverse presentation forms and methods by integrating VR, AR, and AI. VR animation, as a manifestation of technology-driven animation, enhances audience participation by providing immersive experiences[18]. Narrative content is an indispensable element for capturing viewer attention, and AR technology combined with animation heightens realism while offering a more immersive sensory experience[19]. Additionally, AI technology's emergence has narrowed the gap between animated and live-action films, maximizing creators' ability to innovate Oriental stories, sounds, and aesthetics[20]. New technologies present excellent opportunities to amplify the "Chinese voice" in film creation. For example, *Harvest*[21], a 3D-rendered ink animation short directed by Professor Lijun Sun and shortlisted at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival, demonstrates the unique charm of Chinese aesthetics through the fusion of ink-and-wash styles with 3D-rendering techniques. Animation, as a comprehensive art form, emphasizes holistic realism; relying solely on one-dimensional realism is insufficient. Similarly, creating animations without technological innovation results in monotony, whereas focusing solely on technological innovation without aesthetic considerations leads to emptiness. Therefore, the path of artistic creation in the new era requires embracing technological advancements while showcasing Oriental aesthetic charm and depth through one's work. Through the organic combination of intelligent technology and Oriental aesthetics, creators can strive to balance digital innovation with spiritual civilization in the most harmonious way.

3.2.2 The Transformation and Upgrading of the Animation Industry and the Promotion of Oriental Aesthetics

As a continually evolving industry, the animation sector faces both opportunities and challenges under the globalized framework. Animation, as a representative of artistic diversity, shines on the global stage and serves as a vital component of cultural soft power and cultural industry development. Its transformation entails localized aesthetic dissemination, requiring a comprehensive reevaluation.

The internationalization of China's animation industry not only enhances the country's global dis-

course power but also shapes a unique international image for Oriental nations, embodying the idea that "the power of culture lies in its dissemination and exchange." Through this art form, cultural dissemination can be realized, showcasing cultural confidence. However, while achieving global cultural dissemination, maintaining the diversity and uniqueness of indigenous culture should be prioritized. As a treasure of humanity's shared destiny, cultural diversity must be preserved. Animation and animated films, as key carriers, should ensure their distinctiveness and innovation amid the tide of globalization.

According to statistics, the total value of China's animation and manga-related industries was 87.085 billion RMB in 2013. Looking ahead to 2023, the cluster revenue of Guangzhou's related industries alone reached 130 billion RMB[22]. While progress and breakthroughs have been achieved, the future demands a dual emphasis on humanistic and technological integration. Humanistic content is the soul of artistic expression, while technology acts as its structure. The former provides essence, while the latter offers form. Innovation-driven development requires disruptive technological breakthroughs[23]. In terms of technology and content, it is necessary to balance autonomy and creativity. Creators should focus on applying artificial intelligence (AI) technologies and emerging productivity tools in industrialized production processes. Examples include the sci-fi short film *Earth Cannon* produced by Beijing Film Academy, the animated film *The Foolish Old Man Moves the Mountain*, and the AI puppet-style film *Jingyang Ridge*. These works utilized AI technology to improve production efficiency and achieve superior visual effects[24]. While technological advancements enhance visual effects, they should ultimately serve the narrative content and cultural heritage. The transformation and upgrading of the animation industry strongly support the promotion of Oriental aesthetics. In recent years, China's animation industry has made significant progress in policy support, technological innovation, and market expansion, forming a relatively comprehensive industrial chain and ecosystem. This transformation has not only improved the production efficiency and quality of animated works but has also provided broader market opportunities and channels for promoting Oriental aesthetics. As Chinese animated works continue to gain influence in international markets, Oriental aesthetics are gradually being recognized and embraced by audiences in more countries and regions, actively contributing to the global dissemination and exchange of Chinese culture.

IV. Conclusion

The development of Oriental aesthetics in Chinese animated films is closely tied to the times, evolving through stages of conscious exploration, aesthetic maturity, and innovative resurgence. The early stage, shaped by the national revival movement and adversity amid a national crisis, utilized local cultural elements and political themes to achieve identity recognition. The mid-stage witnessed aesthetic maturity, rooted in traditional culture and incorporating Oriental philosophical thought to form a unique artistic style and aesthetic system. In the contemporary era, under globalization and technological transformation, Oriental aesthetic paradigms are being reconstructed through media integration and technological innovation. Looking to the future, Chinese animated films face both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, they must avoid over-reliance on technology, balancing technological innovation with humanistic depth, and fully exploring the essence of Oriental culture to construct cultural identity. On the other hand, they must strengthen China's role in the international discourse system, preserving local cultural characteristics amid globalization while promoting international collaboration. This will enhance global competitiveness and contribute Oriental wisdom to global cultural diversity.

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Historical Imagery in Animated Films:

Representation and Interpretation of Ancient Civilizations

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Abstract

Modern animated films possess numerous artistic advantages in inheriting and developing history. Applying Michel Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge* as a research method allows for an in-depth interpretation of symbols, meanings, and impacts within animated films. This approach also enables a multifaceted examination of historical connotations in animation, including potential biases, misinterpretations, or creative liberties, as well as their influence on public perceptions of ancient civilizations. Such analysis highlights the significance of animated films in cultural preservation, educating younger generations, and facilitating international cultural exchange. Based on this framework, this study explores four key aspects: the relationship between history and animated films, the selection of ancient civilization themes in animated films, historical deviations and creative liberties in animated storytelling, and the educational value of animated films concerning ancient civilizations. By analyzing these dimensions, the paper investigates how animated films can effectively represent historical imagery while aligning with the aesthetic preferences of modern audiences.

Keywords: animated films; archaeology of knowledge; Thirty Thousand Miles of Chang'an; Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child; Havoc in Heaven

Foucault emphasizes that archaeology opposes continuity, origins, and totalization through discontinuity, rupture, and difference, presenting a completely different kind of history rather than one focused on change[1]. Animated films interact with history by showcasing cultural backgrounds and traditional values through modern technological means. This aligns with the concepts of discontinuity, rupture, and difference in Foucault's *Archaeology of Knowledge*. The choice of animation to represent ancient civilizations can be justified for several reasons: 1. Modern Technology and Traditional Art: Using modern animation technologies to present traditional arts offers audiences a novel way to appreciate and understand ancient Chinese civilization. This resonates with Foucault's examination of how knowledge takes form and is expressed in specific historical contexts; 2. Artistic Interpretation of Truth: Animation films, as a widely accessible art form, often provide artistic interpretations of ancient civilizations and historical events, constructing a form of "truth." This connects with Foucault's exploration of how truth and power are constructed and defined within specific social and cultural contexts. By presenting ancient stories and histories through animation, younger generations can connect with their national culture; 3. Visualization of Abstract Concepts: Animation has the ability to transform complex or abstract ideas into intuitive and vivid visuals, enabling audiences to easily observe and appreciate abstract historical content; 4. Artistic Freedom and Historical Representation: Animated films can artistically reinterpret history. Foucault argues that knowledge is not linearly accumulated but exists with ruptures and continuities. Thus, animated films must emphasize specific themes or emotions of a period to offer audiences a deeper experience and understanding, allowing a dialectical observation and comprehension of history; 5. Global Reach: Animated films are not only popular domestically but also attract international audiences. Foucault's focus on how knowledge flows and changes between different cultures and societies underscores the role of animated films as tools for preserving and transmitting traditional culture. In the modern era of globalization, animation provides a new platform where history evolves from static text into dynamic im-

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agery that resonates deeply with viewers. In summary, animated films serve as a vital medium for connecting modern audiences to ancient civilizations, blending historical representation with creative freedom and making cultural heritage accessible and impactful.

I. The Integration of History and Animated Films

The integration of history and animated films refers to the combination of historical content with the art of animation. This approach not only highlights the authenticity and depth of historical narratives but also showcases the creativity and artistry of animation, achieving multiple purposes such as education and entertainment. Such integration can be realized through visual effects, music, and narrative techniques, allowing audiences to intuitively and emotionally understand and engage with history while sparking their interest in it. For instance, films adapted from ancient Chinese literary works, like *Journey to the West*, *Nezha Conquers the Dragon King*, and *Havoc in Heaven*, as well as modern reinterpretations of ancient legends such as *The New Adventures of the Calabash Brothers*, *Big Fish & Begonia*, and *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, serve as significant animated works that preserve and develop traditional Chinese culture.

1.1 Ways Animated Films Visualize History

Animated films have continuously evolved to provide rich methods and approaches for visualizing historical narratives. By recreating ancient cultures and customs, they offer audiences an intuitive glimpse into the prosperity and diversity of ancient civilizations. For example, in the animated film *Thirty Thousand Miles of Chang'an*, 3D technology is used to vividly recreate Tang dynasty cities and landmarks such as "Chang'an," "Yangzhou," and "Yellow Crane Tower," taking viewers on a romantic journey through time and immersing them in the wonders of the Tang Empire's "Kaiyuan Flourishing Age." Through animation techniques, historical figures are brought to life with distinct personalities, movements, and emotions. Characters such as "Li Bai," "Gao Shi," and "Du Fu," presented through their dynamic "performances" in animated films, allow audiences to delve deeper into their thoughts and actions, fostering a deeper understanding and interpretation of their works. The fusion of traditional art forms and modern animation technology creates historical narratives that blend traditional charm with modernity. For instance, the animated film *White Snake 2: Green Snake* integrates historical settings of the late Song Dynasty with elements like "Asura City" and "Modern West Lake," offering a cross-era reinterpretation. This blend showcases attempts to combine tradition and modernity in storytelling. Films like these demonstrate how animation can make historical narratives more vivid, engaging, and profound by recreating history, incorporating artistic, cultural, and philosophical elements, and adapting to modern tastes.

1.2 Simplification and Representation of Historical Events in Animated Films

As animated films often target younger audiences and children, simplifying complex historical events is essential for easier understanding and acceptance. Animation, as an art form, aims not only to represent facts but also to express the creators' perspectives, emotions, and aesthetics. Creators conduct research and carefully select the most representative and engaging aspects of historical events to recreate, while imbuing them with artistic animation styles. For instance, realistic war scenes might be depicted as epic battles, enhanced with fantasy and surreal elements. In the animated film *Thirty Thousand Miles of Chang'an*, the depiction of the "An Lushan Rebellion" includes both authentic representation and artistic techniques such as montage, which help simplify and stylize historical content for audiences to understand within a short timeframe. To convey themes or viewpoints, animated films can use symbolism and metaphors. For example, in this film, the passage of time is illustrated by the changing colors of leaves on a tree in front of Gao Shi's family home—from fresh green to falling leaves—symbolizing the cycle of spring, summer, autumn, and winter within seconds. The inclusion of other art forms like music, dance, and poetry further enhances the emotional

depth and atmosphere of historical narratives. For instance, performances of the "Zhezhi Dance," "Tage Song," and "Toast to the Wine" in the film add significant artistic flair. Overall, animated films simplify and recreate historical events not only out of necessity but also for artistic expression. Through various techniques and methods, they make historical events more vivid, engaging, and meaningful.

II. The Selection of Ancient Civilizations as Themes in Animated Films

The term "ancient civilizations as themes in animated films" refers to the selection of topics that reflect, depict, or recreate ancient stories, backgrounds, characters, cultures, and events in animation. By utilizing animation techniques, these themes can vividly present ancient social life, customs, beliefs, arts, and architecture, offering audiences an opportunity to deeply understand and connect with ancient civilizations. For example, animated films might depict significant historical events such as wars, migrations, state-building, or political upheavals. They can also showcase important historical figures like emperors, generals, scholars, and artists, highlighting their lives, accomplishments, and influence. Many ancient civilizations are rich in myths and legends, which often explore the origins of civilizations, beliefs, morality, and humanity. Animated films can merge ancient and modern elements to create a time-crossing effect, inspiring reflections on the relationships between history, civilization, tradition, and modernity. This achieves multiple purposes, such as education, entertainment, artistic creation, and cultural preservation. Additionally, the themes and settings of ancient civilizations offer extensive creative possibilities for animation production.

2.1 Selection of Ancient Civilization Themes in Animated Films

To choose ancient civilizations as the content to be showcased in animated films, certain conditions must be met. First, the content must have a certain level of narrative appeal. Many stories, characters, and conflicts from ancient civilizations possess strong narrative appeal. For instance, themes like "Sun Wukong's Havoc in Heaven" and "Nezha Conquers the Dragon King" are inherently dramatic, making them ideal choices for animated films. Representative works include *Havoc in Heaven* and *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*. Secondly, cultural and social context plays a role. Animated films can choose an ancient civilization as a subject to reflect or address current cultural and social circumstances and audience demands. Themes like "The Glorious Tang Dynasty" or "Carefree Wandering" embody Confucian and Daoist philosophies, with examples such as *Thirty Thousand Miles of Chang'an* and *Big Fish & Begonia*. Thirdly, artistic innovation is another factor. For creators seeking to push artistic boundaries, the aesthetics, arts, and culture of certain ancient civilizations provide inspiration and materials. Themes like "The Monkey King" or "The Classic of Mountains and Seas" merge classical literature with modern aesthetics, resulting in films like *Monkey King: Hero Is Back* and *Goodbye Monster*, which have drawn significant attention to ancient civilizations. Finally, market demand is key. If the stories or themes of an ancient civilization have a broad audience base or unique appeal, creators may prioritize these topics. Historical themes must also be adapted to suit the characteristics of different eras.

Through animated films, the recreation of ancient civilizations conveys historical knowledge, universal experiences, and values while educating and inspiring modern audiences. As powerful tools for cultural transmission, animated films support the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural spirit, values, and aesthetics, offering creators ample room for exploration and innovation. Choosing ancient civilizations as themes is a complex process involving numerous considerations and decisions.

2.2 Representativeness and Universality of Civilizations

Depicting the "representativeness and universality" of civilizations in animated films is both a challenge and an opportunity. "Representativeness" means showcasing the unique characteristics of a specific civilization, while "universality" refers to common themes and experiences that transcend different civilizations and cultural contexts.

To represent a civilization's "representativeness", creators must focus on details such as objects, clothing, architecture, customs, and rituals, accurately reflecting the civilization being depicted. For instance, in the animated film *Thirty Thousand Miles of Chang'an*, the portrayal of "exam writings" and "recommendations" represents the Tang Dynasty's civil service examination system. Creators also need to use appropriate languages, dialects, or music that correspond to the civilization, while presenting traditional festivals, celebrations, ceremonies, and daily customs. Additionally, religious practices, myths, and belief systems can be depicted. For example, *Havoc in Heaven* presents an ancient cosmology, with Sun Wukong portrayed as an independent, free-spirited, and rebellious character whose actions challenge the established order of the "Heavenly Court." This story conveys themes of pursuing freedom and equality.

To express "universality", creators can focus on fundamental human emotions and experiences, such as love, familial bonds, exploration, and personal growth, which are common across civilizations. This includes depicting shared social contexts like celebrations, weddings, and coming-of-age ceremonies. Universal human values, such as courage, loyalty, justice, and friendship, can also be emphasized. Furthermore, symbolism and metaphors can convey universal themes and emotions. For instance, in *Nezha: Birth of the Demon Child*, Nezha is portrayed as a rebellious young individual seeking his identity, reflecting modern audiences' desire for deeper, more complex characters. This approach resonates with the challenges of identity and growth faced by today's youth in modern society.

Although the background and details of stories may vary across civilizations, their basic structure and plot twists are often universal. Animated filmmakers must find a balance between "representativeness" and "universality," ensuring that the unique characteristics of a civilization are highlighted while maintaining resonance with a broad audience.

III. Historical Deviations and Creative Freedom in Animated Films

When animated films depict historical events, they often make modifications, omissions, or creative adjustments for artistic or narrative purposes. These changes can be classified into historical deviation and creative liberty. Historical deviation refers to differences between the historical content in animated films and actual historical records, whether intentional or not. Some deviations aim to make the plot more engaging or concise, while others focus on conveying particular messages, values, or artistic expressions. Creative liberty involves the freedom filmmakers use to explore themes while balancing historical accuracy and artistic innovation. It allows them to reinterpret, combine, or adapt historical events, characters, or contexts to suit the narrative's needs or present unique perspectives. This interplay highlights the balance between historical representation and artistic creativity in animated storytelling.

In many historical-themed animated films, we can observe the presence of "historical deviation and creative liberty." For example, an animated film might compress the timeline of a historical event, condensing occurrences that span several years into a much shorter timeframe. To serve the narrative, entirely fictional historical figures might be created, or real historical figures might be altered in terms of personality or appearance. For instance, the character "Pei Shier" in *Thirty Thousand Miles of Chang'an* is a fictional historical figure. In some cases, animated films might reinterpret or adapt historical events to emphasize certain themes or values.

3.1 The balance between historical authenticity and artistic representation

Foucault, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, emphasizes that knowledge is neither singular nor fixed; it emerges and evolves within specific historical and cultural contexts. This construction and transformation of knowledge are closely tied to power, institutions, culture, and social practices. He juxtaposes power with discourse, where discourse entails the formulation of rules and the guidance of thought[2]. First, Foucault argues that knowledge is not objectively existent; rather, it is constructed within particular social, cultural, and histor-

ical contexts. Thus, prior to producing animated films, in-depth historical research must be conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the era, events, and characters. Historians or experts should be invited to participate in the project to provide guidance and recommendations, ensuring the film's content aligns with historical facts. In *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, the recreation and modern interpretation of traditional mythology represent a new narrative practice, forming a discourse that reflects modern society's understanding and interpretation of ancient civilization. Second, Foucault emphasizes the role of power in the production and circulation of knowledge. In *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, Ne Zha's conflicts and struggles with family, society, and fate can be seen as an exploration and challenge to power dynamics. Third, Foucault views knowledge as diverse, with different cultures and societies possessing varying systems of knowledge. Animated films likewise provide a diverse platform, using symbols or metaphors to represent complex historical concepts or events, making them easier to express in the animated format. Fourth, Foucault discusses the discontinuity of knowledge. In animated films, due to artistic creative freedom and historical deviation, there may be fragmented interpretations and representations of history. Yet, even if certain events or details are adapted or omitted, efforts should be made to ensure the emotions, themes, or values conveyed by the animated film align with historical authenticity. Through the emotions, conflicts, and growth of the characters, the actual impact and significance of historical events can be reflected. For instance, *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* modernizes and recreates the traditional Ne Zha myth. Traditionally, Ne Zha is portrayed as a brave, sometimes hot-tempered warrior. In the film, however, Ne Zha is depicted as a rebellious young man, conflicted with family and society, striving to find his own identity. This transformation of character reflects a rupture from traditional knowledge, infusing modernity into the character.

The Archaeology of Knowledge mainly focuses on the production and circulation of knowledge rather than artistic creation. Nevertheless, its core concepts and theories resonate with the representation of history in animated films, helping creators better understand how to balance art and authenticity.

3.2 Historical misinterpretation and creative expansion in animated film creation

Journey to the West is a novel that combines history, mythology, religion, and culture. While it contains many elements based on real history and culture, it is primarily a work of fiction and does not accurately reproduce historical events. In the animated film *The Monkey King: Havoc in Heaven*, much of the content is based on *Journey to the West* and further adjusted to suit the format and duration of the movie. The depictions of the Heavenly Court, deities, and events are mainly intended to express the themes and narrative of the novel, rather than faithfully recreate history or mythology. As an artistic work, it does not entirely pursue accuracy but relies on a certain degree of fidelity, using artistic adaptations for visual effects and storytelling purposes. This can be described as "a modern Chinese linguistic vocabulary and deep discourse structure that directly reproduce the contemporary experiences of the Chinese nation and express their inner true needs"[3]. In terms of visual art: *The Monkey King: Havoc in Heaven* is influenced by traditional Chinese painting, particularly landscapes and meticulous brushwork, offering viewers a classical Chinese visual experience. Regarding character design: The gods, demons, and other characters in the movie are largely inspired by Chinese mythology and folklore. However, artistic adjustments and innovations were made to their appearances and personalities for cinematic effect. Regarding music and sound effects: The film's score draws heavily from traditional Chinese music, incorporating traditional instruments like the erhu, flute, and gongs to deepen the classical atmosphere. As an animated film, *The Monkey King: Havoc in Heaven* provides viewers with an artistically rich mythical world of ancient China. Through innovative artistic techniques, it successfully conveys the themes and emotions of *Journey to the West*, presenting audiences with an imaginative classical world.

Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child is a significant work in Chinese animation in recent years, achieving remarkable success in both box office performance and critical acclaim. This film offers a modern reinterpretation of the traditional Ne Zha story, integrating new plots and characters—such as Ne Zha's relationships with enemies and parents—injecting new life into the traditional myth. It deeply develops Ne Zha's character,

showcasing his growth, conflicts, and struggles. The film also uses advanced animation technology, delivering stunning visual effects to audiences. It not only serves as a modern interpretation of ancient mythology but also delves into Chinese traditional culture, family values, and personal development. Regarding character creation: In ancient mythology, Ne Zha is a brave and fierce deity. In this film, his character transforms into a rebellious, unruly, mischievous troublemaker who loves pranks, often causes chaos, yet is clever, kind-hearted, and inwardly lonely, yearning for recognition—a little devilish king of mayhem[4]. Regarding the fusion of traditional elements: The movie is rich with traditional Chinese features, such as clothing, architecture, and weapons, all symbols of ancient Chinese civilization. For instance, the "Scroll of Mountains and Rivers" is one of the most visually representative scenes. After Ne Zha and Ao Bing accidentally fall into the scroll, a beautiful scene unfolds before the audience: lotus leaves floating on the water, temple palaces, towering mountains, and flowing rivers—all creating a poetic charm[5]. These details reflect respect and admiration for ancient civilization. Regarding family values: The depiction of family relationships in the movie is deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, especially father-son relationships. Ne Zha's conflicts and reconciliation with his father reflect the importance placed on filial piety in ancient Chinese civilization. Regarding Taoist and Confucian philosophies: Many elements in the film are connected to Taoist and Confucian ideas, such as fate, predestination, and the relationship between humans and the universe—core concepts of ancient Chinese civilization. Regarding ancient mythology and modern interpretation: The film reinterprets Ne Zha's story, such as his birth and conflict with the Dragon Kings of the Four Seas. This modern take makes traditional mythology more relatable to contemporary audiences while showcasing the lasting allure of ancient Chinese civilization. Regarding visual arts representation: The movie integrates animation technology with traditional Chinese artistic styles, like ink painting and classical architecture—hallmarks of ancient Chinese civilization. In conclusion, *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* is not merely a recreation of ancient mythology but an in-depth exploration of ancient Chinese civilization. Through a modern perspective, it showcases the charm and value of ancient civilization while providing contemporary audiences with a new understanding and appreciation of traditional culture.

IV. The educational value of animated films on ancient civilizations

Through the audiovisual narrative form of animated films, audiences can gain education and insights into ancient civilizations. First, compared to traditional text or pictorial materials, animated films provide audiences with more vivid and direct reproductions of scenes from ancient civilizations. They can place events, characters, and cultures within contextual backgrounds, helping audiences better understand and feel the historical context and dynamics. Second, animated films are a highly appealing art form, especially for many young people and children. They can stimulate their interest and curiosity about history, encouraging them to further explore and learn. This helps audiences understand and respect diverse cultures, promoting cross-cultural exchange and understanding. Third, by watching animated films depicting ancient civilizations from different periods or regions, audiences can reflect on the continuity and transformation of history, understand the rise and fall of civilizations, and their transitions. Although the content of animated films may deviate from actual history due to artistic creativity or other reasons, audiences can also learn to critically think and evaluate what they see while watching these films.

4.1 How animated films help audiences understand and engage with ancient civilizations
Animated films have unique advantages and roles in helping audiences understand and engage with ancient civilizations. First, they incorporate traditional cultural elements. Many animated films delve deeply into traditional culture during their creation process, such as mythology, legends, and folklore, transforming them into vivid animated formats. For example, "Sun Wukong" from *The Monkey King: Havoc in Heaven* and "Ne Zha" from *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child* both originate from classic Chinese literature and stories.

Second, they blend inheritance and innovation in artistic styles. Animated films often combine traditional elements with modern animation techniques, creating works with both classical charm and contemporary appeal. For instance, the decorative imagery in *The Monkey King: Havoc in Heaven* exemplifies the aesthetic of Clive Bell's concept of "significant form." Third, they utilize language and dialogue effectively. Through dialogue and narration, animated films can incorporate ancient languages or classic literary content. For example, in *Thirty Thousand Miles of Chang'an*, the rendition of the poem "Quiet Night Thoughts" vividly brings Li Bai's nostalgia and poetic expression to the screen, helping audiences better appreciate the language and culture of ancient civilizations. Fourth, they showcase daily life and customs. Audiences can directly observe aspects of ancient people's daily lives, dietary habits, clothing, and festive activities. For instance, *Thirty Thousand Miles of Chang'an* portrays the "Qujiang Banquet," a celebratory event held after scholars passed the imperial examination, hosted at Qujiang Pavilion and designated by the emperor. The "Qujiang Banquet" was the most grand and formal among the many feasts held by these scholars[6]. Such depictions allow audiences to gain deeper insights into ancient civilizations. Fifth, they explore morality and philosophy. Animated films can present the profound moral and philosophical themes embedded in many ancient stories. For example, in *Ne Zha: Birth of the Demon Child*, the relationship between Ne Zha and Ao Bing evolves from adversarial to mutual cooperation, transitioning from familial conflict to shared destiny. This narrative breaks away from traditional "unjust fate" tropes, emphasizing the unity of destiny and expressing the theme of "My destiny is determined by myself, not by the heavens"[7]. These elements encourage audiences to reflect and learn. Through these creative and innovative approaches, animated films serve as bridges connecting audiences to ancient civilizations, enriching their understanding and appreciation.

4.2 The role of animated films in education and cultural dissemination

Animated films play a significant role in education and cultural dissemination. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* explores the processes of knowledge formation, dissemination, and disappearance. In this context, animated films, as a medium of communication, can be seen as carriers and disseminators of knowledge. Due to their creative flexibility, animated films are not constrained by real-life settings or character design, allowing for transformative and exaggerated visual effects. This makes it easier for them to replicate the vast world, reflect human experiences, and even recreate the boundless imagination of the human spirit, fulfilling the audience's pursuit of artistic novelty[8]. Additionally, animated films can help uncover and preserve knowledge and cultures that might otherwise be forgotten or overlooked, achieving a form of knowledge archaeology and revival. As an international art form, animated films can easily transcend language and cultural barriers, resonating with and being understood by diverse audiences. Combining imagination, creativity, and reality, they present audiences with new perspectives and ways of thinking. By reenacting traditional stories, myths, and legends, animated films contribute to the preservation and dissemination of national history and culture. Many animated films go beyond mere entertainment, addressing contemporary social issues and problems, inspiring audiences to think about and discuss these topics.

V. Conclusion

Animated films have certain advantages and limitations when it comes to recreating ancient civilizations. Taking China as an example, the advantages lie in its thousands of years of history and cultural traditions, providing abundant material and inspiration for animated films. These resources enable the creation of works that combine classical charm with modern aesthetics. Ancient myths, legends, and historical stories offer rich plots and character settings, and many of these stories contain profound morals and philosophies that animated films can bring to life. The limitations, however, include the artistic treatment of historical events to enhance dramatic appeal and engagement, which may lead to deviations or distortions of historical accuracy. Although Chinese animated films have a strong cultural foundation, some cultural elements might be difficult

for international audiences to understand when targeting global markets. Compared to major international animation studios, Chinese animated films face certain technical and resource constraints, which may affect their quality and innovation.

Building upon research into animated films and the recreation of ancient civilizations, future studies on Chinese animated films should focus on employing diverse perspectives to analyze how they reinterpret and delve deeper into ancient civilizations. By integrating new technologies such as AR, VR, and AIGC, these films could better showcase ancient civilizations. Comparative studies between Chinese animated films and those from other countries or regions could further reveal the processes of cultural exchange and integration. It is also crucial to carefully explore the competitive strategies of Chinese animated films in the global market and consider how to leverage resources from ancient civilizations to establish unique brand advantages. Animated films can serve as enduring and widespread mediums to preserve and disseminate endangered cultures, knowledge, or history. Through these approaches, future researchers and creators of animated films should systematically and comprehensively explore the relationship between Chinese animation and the recreation of ancient civilizations, offering audiences richer and more profound cultural experiences.

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The Relationship Between Gestalt Psychology's Principle of Holism and Theatrical Character Development

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Abstract

Gestalt psychology emphasizes that the human brain tends to organize elements into a complete whole during perception and cognition. This "holism" applies not only to visual perception but also provides insights into understanding literary and theatrical characters. The shaping of theatrical characters often consists of multiple elements (dialogue, body language, external appearance, etc.), which audiences integrate into an overall impression of the character. Audiences naturally perceive the character as a unified whole, rather than seeing the fragments in isolation, forming a consistent and meaningful cognition. This aligns closely with the cognitive principles proposed by Gestalt psychology. When observing an image, the brain does not decompose it into isolated points, lines, and surfaces but rather combines the elements and even fills in missing information, presenting it as a relatively complete and simple whole.

Keywords: Gestalt Psychology; Principle of Holism; Character Development; Cognitive Consistency; Perceptual Organization; Audience Cognition

I. Cognitive consistency of roles: cognitive unity of integrity and role image

Cognitive consistency refers to the tendency of the audience to form a coherent image when understanding a role, and expect the behavior and characteristics of the role to conform to this overall impression. When forming an impression of a character, people pay more attention to how the various elements merge into an overall image rather than isolated fragments. People's impression of other people's personalities is not a simple addition of independent traits, but a unified cognitive structure. Certain core traits will affect the formation of the overall impression, and other information is subordinate to the organization of the overall impression. When watching a drama, the audience will establish an overall expectation of the role based on the key traits initially presented by the role (such as integrity, cunning, melancholy, etc.), and interpret the subsequent words and deeds of the role accordingly.

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle stated in *Poetics* that even if a character in a play possesses a complex and multifaceted personality, their actions should align with their internal logic and the consistency of their character, and they should not contradict themselves without reason[1]. Even if different aspects are shown in different situations, these aspects should be subject to the overall personality setting of the character. Even when a character exhibits different aspects in various situations, these aspects must conform to the character's overall personality design. For example: "A character who hides their true intentions behind a smile should consistently display their inner traits in every scenario. They shouldn't suddenly shift from being sinister and cunning to naïve and innocent, or abruptly transition to being honest and chivalrous, without persuasive reasoning. Such inconsistent changes will make the character unconvincing to the audience."[2] Unexplained contradictions only harm the completeness of the character's image, causing the audience to lose immersion and question the authenticity of the character.

Consistency does not mean single stereotype. Excellent drama characters are often complex and contradictory, but this contradiction itself has its deep reasons and can be integrated under the overall framework

of the character. Shakespeare's "Hamlet" has a complex personality. He is both melancholy and suspicious, in-decisive, and witty, brave, and responsible. These seemingly contradictory personality traits are intertwined and influence each other, and together constitute his rich and profound inner world. When the audience accepts this role, they will not feel disconnected. On the contrary, because the screenwriter and the actor provide sufficient inner monologues and motivation explanations, they can unify the various contradictions of "Ham-let" into an overall image of "complex but real personality". The cognitive consistency of a character lies in the organic integration of all aspects of the character's characteristics. As long as the character's multifaceted nature has an internal logical connection, the audience will still understand it as a complete character in a Gestalt way, rather than focusing on isolated character fragments.

II. Holistic construction of character image: synergy of narrative and performance

In order to enable the audience to form a complete understanding of the character, playwrights and per-formers must pay attention to the holistic construction of the character image in their creation. This means that the character cannot be created by a single element, but through the synergy of multiple levels, it serves the overall image of the character in a consistent manner. This holistic construction concept is consistent with the "part obeys the whole" emphasized by Gestalt psychology. Each element only gains meaning in the whole, and the fragmented elements separated from the whole cannot effectively convey the character image.

The script needs to provide the character with a core motivation throughout the play, so that the audi-ence can organize the various plot fragments experienced by the character into a coherent life story. King Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex* revolves around "seeking the truth"[3]. A series of seemingly independent events in the plot (prophecy, quarrels, investigations, memories, etc.) are eventually connected to form a complete picture of his fate. When the truth is revealed to the world, the fragments in the audience's mind are suddenly inte-grated into an organic whole, and the tragic image of Oedipus therefore has a strong impact. This gestalt effect achieved through narrative structure makes the character image complete at the climax of the drama, and also confirms the gestalt principle of Gestalt - people tend to "close" scattered information into complete meaning.

The actor's interpretation of the role undertakes the task of transforming the text in the script into a three-dimensional and vivid image. The performance needs to construct the external image of the character from the aspects of body, lines, expressions, etc., and present the internal motivation of the character through stage actions. The Gestalt principle of integrity reminds us that the audience's perception of the character comes from the comprehensive effect of the performance elements. For example, clothing and makeup pro-vide external image clues, the actor's movements and manners reflect personality characteristics, and the tone and tone convey the psychological state. These elements support each other and are indispensable. To create the image of a resolute and courageous general, the actor may use a steady and powerful stage step, a loud and firm voice, and supplemented with concise and powerful lines and upright and majestic military uniforms - these elements together constitute the overall image of the character. Any deductive details that are separated from the whole will appear abrupt. Successful character creation requires the unity of style of each perfor-mance element. As Stanislavsky advocated, actors should conceive "through-actions" and "overall images" for their roles, and keep the role's identity and emotional logic consistent throughout the performance[4]. Only then can the audience consciously organize every action and every line of the role on stage into the overall image of the role, rather than a collection of scattered behaviors.

III. Audience's cognitive processing of characters: the influence of Gestalt principles

When watching a play, the audience actively processes the character image. Many principles of Gestalt psychology (such as the Gestalt principle, the perceptual organization principle, etc.) are deeply involved in this processing process and determine how the audience understands and accepts the character[5]. The audi-

ence's brain will use the "grouping" and "filling" mechanisms to classify and integrate the various character information obtained on the stage, fill in the gaps, and thus form meaningful character cognition.

The Gestalt principle makes the audience tend to fill in the gaps in character information. It is impossible for a drama performance to clearly show all the background and psychological details of the character, and the audience often needs to infer and imagine based on clues. When the plot only implies that the character has a traumatic past but does not elaborate on the details, the audience often relies on the Gestalt tendency to "fill in" a reasonable background in their minds to fill in the incomplete part of the character image. This psychological filling process is similar to the automatic visualizing of the missing part when we look at an incomplete figure (when one corner of a triangle is missing, the outline of a triangle is still perceived) - the brain craves a complete meaning schema and is unwilling to leave cognitive gaps. In character creation, playwrights can use this principle to let the audience complete their own imagination of the character through hints or blanks, thereby enhancing the sense of participation and the three-dimensionality of the character image. The reasons for the formation of Willy Loman's character in "Death of a Salesman" are not fully explained in detail. The audience will speculate his past experiences (such as the frustration of failed entrepreneurship, expectations for children, etc.) based on the plot clues, thereby completing their understanding of the tragic image of this little man. Appropriate blanks stimulate the audience's Gestalt processing and make the character image richer in the audience's mind. On the contrary, if there is no clue at all about the key motivation or background of the character, it is difficult for the audience to close the information gap, and the character image will appear vague and reduce the appeal.

The perceptual organization principle guides the audience to group scattered information into meaningful character feature patterns. According to the Gestalt principle of similarity and proximity, the audience will classify similar behaviors or emotions shown by the character in different scenes into the same category, thereby identifying the character's lasting characteristics. If a character repeatedly shows brave and selfless behavior in multiple scenes (regardless of the different situations), the audience will organize these behaviors into a stable character trait of "heroism". This integration of similar elements helps the audience quickly grasp the core personality of the character. The proximity principle suggests that the audience will also tend to associate character events that occur close in time or scene, and find the cause and effect or motivation connection of the character's behavior. A character has just experienced frustration (the previous scene), and then in the next scene, he loses control and roars. The audience will naturally associate the two and understand that his anger is caused by the frustration in the previous scene, and will not separate the two performances. This is actually the audience applying the principle of continuity of perception to maintain the cause and effect continuity and plot logic of the character's behavior. Weaving various fragments of information about the character into orderly core personality traits, emotional context, character relationships, etc., makes the character image a well-organized and meaningful whole in their cognition.

The "figure-ground" principle of Gestalt affects the audience's cognitive distinction between the main character and the secondary character. The stage presents a rich amount of information, and the audience will automatically focus on the prominent "figure" - usually the words and deeds of the main character, and weaken other secondary characters or environments as background. This psychological mechanism ensures that the audience concentrates cognitive resources on building the image of the main character and will not be disturbed by irrelevant details. At the level of drama and director, lighting, positioning and other means are also used to highlight the protagonist and downplay the background, in line with the audience's tendency to separate "figure-background". The "figure-background" relationship is not static. Sometimes when a certain action or sentence of a supporting role becomes a turning point in the plot, it will instantly become a "figure" that attracts the audience's attention. The creator needs to consciously guide the transformation of the primary and secondary roles in the audience's mind throughout the drama process, so that the audience can always grasp the most critical information for understanding the character creation. Through this clear organization of primary and secondary, the audience can focus on the clues of the creation of the main characters and grasp

the complete picture of the characters from a macro perspective.

Gestalt theory points out that perception depends not only on current stimuli, but also on past experiences. The audience's understanding of the characters will also refer to their existing social and cultural knowledge and archetypal experience. Classic historical dramas often create character images that conform to a certain archetype (such as "tragic hero", "wise monarch", etc.). When the audience recognizes that a character conforms to a certain archetype, they will quickly call on the complete knowledge framework of the archetype to apply to the character, thereby immediately gaining an overall grasp of the character. This is an experience-based gestalt. The fragmentary information of the character activates the ready-made Gestalt schema in the audience's memory, making the character image more full and easy to understand. However, excellent dramas may also break the archetypal expectations (The latest Chinese animated film, *Ne Zha 2*) and add unexpected layers to the characters to create dramatic tension. Even so, the audience will still try to incorporate the new information into the overall schema to adjust and update it, rather than fragmenting the character image. This reflects the initiative of the audience's cognitive processing. They use the Gestalt principles to actively construct the character image and complete the psychological process from scattered information to a complete character in their minds.

IV. Conclusion

The Gestalt psychology principle of "holism" offers a unique perspective on understanding the creation of theatrical characters. Character development is not a simple assembly of personality traits and plot events; it is a process of generating an organic whole. For playwrights, the principle of holism means that they must focus on the consistency and interconnectedness of various elements when creating characters. Through the coordination and unification of storytelling, performance, and other dimensions, they can craft vivid and cohesive character profiles. The construction of a character's holistic image requires every aspect of the plot and stage presentation to collaboratively serve character depiction, avoiding fragmentation. Furthermore, audiences' cognitive processing of characters demonstrates the impact of Gestalt principles of completeness and organization—viewers excel at combining and filling in fragmented information to form a complete understanding of the character.

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Cultural Integration and Human Balance: Exploring Modern Social Issues Through Oscar-Winning Films

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Abstract

   The Academy Awards, as one of the most prestigious accolades in the global film industry, honor films that achieve exceptional recognition and praise not only in the realm of artistry but also for their broad and profound social and cultural impact. In recent years, the Oscars have expanded their scope and continuously refined their criteria for eligible films, allowing numerous outstanding works on diverse subjects to emerge. The types of films winning awards are no longer singular, and their content has become increasingly inclusive. For example, the 90th Academy Award-winning *The Shape of Water* belongs to the monster genre, while the 95th Academy Award-winning *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is a science fiction film. Through their unique artistic expressions, these films not only showcase the charm of cinematic art but also profoundly explore various issues within human society.

Keywords: Oscar, Culture, Social Issues

I. The true meaning of Balance and the philosophy of the Academy Awards

1.1 The profound meaning of cultural integration and balance

   In 1990, the 62nd Academy Award-winning animated short film *Balance* garnered high acclaim from audiences and judges worldwide with its unique perspective and profound depth.

Fig. 1. Balance

   The animated short film *Balance* uses simple yet highly symbolic visuals to tell a story about humanity, morality, and choice. The characters in the film, placed in an apparently simple setting, face a series of complex decisions and challenges. These choices not only determine their individual fates but also reflect broader societal moral dilemmas and the complexities of human nature. Through this clever setup, the film successfully immerses the audience in a world full of philosophical thought, provoking deep reflection on personal actions and moral decisions.

   Beyond *Balance*, other Oscar-winning films have also highlighted themes of cultural integration, showcasing the complexity and diversity of human issues in the context of globalization. Over the years, these

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films have told unique stories from different countries and regions, not only displaying distinctive cultural features but also exploring the exchange, collision, and fusion between various cultures amidst globalization. Through these narratives, audiences can better understand the values and lifestyles rooted in different cultural contexts, thereby fostering appreciation and respect for global cultural diversity.

Oscar-winning films, whether animated shorts or international features, have had a profound impact on both artistic and socio-cultural levels. These films not only provide visual and emotional enjoyment but also, through their profound themes and unique expressions, inspire deep reflection on humanity, morality, and social issues.

1.2 Social morality and reflections on human nature

By conducting an in-depth analysis and exploration of the animated short film *Balance* and other Oscar-winning films, we uncover how these works reflect the complex issues of cultural integration and human balance in contemporary society on both visual and narrative levels. Additionally, we examine how these films, through their unique artistic techniques and narrative structures, depict individuals from various cultural backgrounds seeking self-identity and harmonious coexistence in modern society. A detailed interpretation of these films reveals the profound social and philosophical meanings embedded within, offering new perspectives and pathways for understanding the cultural diversity and complexity of human nature in modern society.

Through the analysis of these films, we can better understand the intentions and expressions of the filmmakers while gaining valuable insights into the challenges of cultural integration and human balance in modern society. These reflections provide meaningful references and inspiration for academic research and practical applications in related fields.

II. Discussion on cultural integration and humanity in films

2.1 Theory of cultural integration

The theory of cultural integration explores how different cultures merge to form new cultural phenomena through interaction and collision. In the context of globalization, cultural integration is not only an inevitable result of progress but also a crucial factor in advancing societal development. It manifests in various forms such as language exchange, artistic expression, and the transmission of customs, often bringing innovation and diversity while injecting new vitality into society.

However, cultural integration is not always a seamless process. The cultural impact of globalization may threaten existing cultures, and cultural conflicts may arise as a result. For instance, under the current trend of inclusivity and diversity, Hollywood films are no longer confined to traditional genres. Instead, they incorporate a broader range of themes, embedding the intrinsic or local cultural elements of various countries and regions into each film. This integration stems from multiple factors and comes with both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage lies in the diversity of genres and the inclusivity and fusion between different cultures. The disadvantage is subjective consciousness, as not all cultural elements resonate with audiences universally.

In some instances, dominant cultures may overshadow or erode local cultures, leading to a loss of cultural diversity. Over the past two years, many fairy tales have been remade, such as The Little Mermaid and Snow White. When selecting cast members, to address cultural awareness of specific regions and groups, actors were chosen who challenged traditional perceptions of these classic roles. Such "breakthroughs" represent a challenge, and to address these challenges, countries need to establish effective cultural policies that ensure the protection and inheritance of local cultures while fostering mutual understanding and respect among different cultures.

Fig. 2. *Little Mermaid* and *Snow White*

In the animated short film *Balance*, this theory is deeply embodied. The film portrays the collision and fusion of different cultures and values, exploring the complexities and challenges of cultural integration. The characters in the film come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and their interactions reflect the real-world dilemmas and opportunities of cultural integration. The depiction of cultural conflict and fusion in the film helps viewers better understand the internal mechanisms and social impacts of the cultural integration process.

2.2 Philosophical exploration of humanity and balance

The concept of balance holds significant importance in philosophy, referring to a stable state that a system achieves through the interaction of various forces and factors. In human society and individual life, balance often encompasses harmony, stability, and sustainable development. It is not merely a physical concept but also an ideal psychological and social state. Human nature, with its inherent desires and temptations, often disrupts this balance. On a societal level, the escalation of individual desires may result in unequal distribution of resources, leading to conflicts and instability. On a personal level, excessive pursuit of desires and goals may cause psychological imbalance and life difficulties. Thus, balance serves not only as the foundation of societal stability but also as the key to individual happiness. The film *Everything Everywhere All at Once* beautifully exemplifies this notion of personal happiness. Starring Chinese-American action actress Michelle Yeoh, the film won seven Oscars at the 95th Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress, Best Editing, Best Original Screenplay, and Best Supporting Actor and Actress, making it the well-deserved biggest winner of the year.

Fig. 3 *Everything Everywhere All at Once*

In the film, Evelyn, a middle-aged woman portrayed by Michelle Yeoh, assumes various identities and roles across different universes. However, in her own universe, she feels increasingly despondent and yearns to break free from this monotony, seeking to experience different lives and challenges.

Across these universes, Evelyn encounters various versions of herself, including a rock star, a kung fu master, and even a ruler of the cosmos. She embarks on a journey of self-discovery, attempting to understand the meaning and purpose of her existence. Throughout this process, her relationships with her daughter and husband are also tested. As the story progresses, Evelyn gradually realizes that although each universe is unique, true happiness does not come from external achievements or power but from the love and connection she shares with her family. Ultimately, she understands that the essence of happiness has always been by her side, in being with her loved ones, regardless of the universe she inhabits. Through this journey, Evelyn learns to embrace her imperfections, cherish her relationships with her family, and bravely face the challenges and difficulties in life, finding a sense of balance in her heart.

This theme is also echoed in the short film *Balance*. By observing the five characters on the platform, the film explores their inner conflicts and societal challenges, delving deeply into the relationship between humanity and balance. The main characters in the film face various moral and emotional dilemmas, testing their ability to maintain inner balance in a complex environment. Through its narrative technique, the film portrays the intricacies of human nature and explores potential paths for seeking balance in modern society. The inner world of a character drives their actions and the development of the story. Inner balance typically refers to harmony among emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. When this balance is disrupted, it often leads to conflict and propels the narrative forward. For example, Evelyn in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* struggles between morality and desire, feeling torn between personal beliefs and societal pressures. The audience resonates with the character through her inner struggles, understanding her choices and transformations. Thus, deeply exploring and presenting the inner world of characters is an indispensable part of cinematic storytelling.

Through a detailed analysis of these films, we gain a deeper understanding of the philosophical theory of balance and its application in reality. The plots and characters in the films not only reflect the contradictions inherent in human nature but also provide inspiration on how to find balance in a constantly changing environment. This philosophical exploration not only enhances viewers' appreciation of the films but also prompts us to consider how to achieve true balance in personal and societal life.

III. Cultural conflicts and balanced relationships

3.1 Cultural Conflicts and Environmental Factors

Cultural integration is a complex and dynamic process that goes beyond mutual influences between different cultures. It also involves the transformation and recreation of culture. Against the backdrop of globalization, various cultural forms interact, exchange, and collide, gradually shaping a new global cultural landscape. This process spawns new artistic styles, lifestyles, and social customs, while also driving the redefinition and renewal of traditional cultures to adapt to new cultural environments.

The short film *Balance* profoundly illustrates this process of cultural integration. Set in a multicultural environment, the story depicts how people from diverse cultural backgrounds seek ways to coexist through exchange and conflict. For instance, the protagonists come from different cultural backgrounds, and when faced with shared challenges, they display the uniqueness of their respective cultures while integrating each other's values and lifestyles through interaction. This integration enriches their personal experiences and advances societal cultural development, making culture more diverse and abundant.

However, the process of cultural integration can also trigger challenges such as cultural conflicts and homogenization. These tensions are portrayed in the film through character interactions and conflicts, highlighting misunderstandings and confrontations that may arise. For example, some characters face an identity crisis while adapting to new cultures, reflecting the issues of cultural identity in a globalized context. Through these scenarios, the film emphasizes the importance of effective cultural policies and social mechanisms to address potential negative impacts of cultural integration. This ensures a smooth process while protecting and respecting various cultural traditions.

On a social and cultural level, cultural integration fosters understanding and respect between different social groups, contributing to a more inclusive and diverse society. In the film industry, this integration provides rich material and inspiration for filmmaking, driving innovation in cinematic art. Film, as a powerful cultural medium, can transcend language and geographical barriers to showcase the outcomes of cultural integration to a global audience. Meanwhile, the industry itself becomes a platform for cultural integration, where filmmakers from different countries and regions collaborate to create works with an international perspective. Such collaborations not only promote the exchange of techniques and creativity but also deepen mutual understanding between cultures. Thus, the film industry plays a crucial role in fostering cultural integration and shaping the global cultural landscape, enriching global culture and providing a platform for dialogue and understanding among diverse cultures.

3.2 Balance in Inclusion

In the profound realm of philosophy, balance is not only an essential concept in nature but also a crucial core value in societal structures and personal life. Balance symbolizes a harmonious and stable state achieved between various forces and factors. On the grand stage of human society, balance encompasses the equitable distribution of power, efficient utilization of resources, and smooth coordination of societal structures. In the microcosm of personal life, it pertains to emotional reconciliation, moderation of desires, and appropriate setting of life goals.

The film *Balance*, with its richly diverse narrative techniques, deeply explores the complex relationship between humanity and balance. The characters face challenges on multiple levels, both personal and societal, testing how they maintain inner equilibrium in an ever-changing environment. For instance, the protagonist grapples with sharp conflicts between personal desires and social responsibilities, undergoing profound psychological struggles and difficult decision-making processes. Through vivid scenes, the film delves into how intrinsic human conflicts influence personal psychological balance and the stability of society as a whole.

A key theme of the film is the pursuit of and maintenance of balance in uncertain environments. This pursuit involves thoughtful consideration of personal behaviors as well as timely adjustments to social structures and values. By presenting the characters' decision-making processes in moral and ethical dilemmas, the film thoroughly examines how harmony can be achieved between individuals and society amidst intricate social settings.

Through the storyline and character development of *Balance*, we gain deeper insights into the complexity and diversity of human nature while gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the numerous possibilities for seeking balance in modern society. The philosophical exploration in the film significantly enhances the audience's understanding of the depths of human nature, offering new perspectives that help us ponder how to find appropriate equilibrium between individuals and society.

IV. In-depth analysis of *Balance* and the integration of film culture

4.1 In-depth Analysis of *Balance*

The animated short film *Balance* uses a minimalist visual style and profound symbolism to delve into moral crises and ethical challenges rooted in human nature. The story is set on a mysterious suspended platform where five identical, expressionless characters must continually adjust their positions to maintain delicate equilibrium. This unique setup creates a strong visual impact while subtly metaphorizing humanity's fragility and vulnerability when facing various temptations and desires.

The platform symbolizes societal structures or moral norms, while the characters' actions represent the diverse, conflicting desires and inner struggles inherent in human nature. Their uniform expressions and attire further strengthen the symbolic meaning, suggesting that while humans may appear unified in shared dilem-

mas, their deep-seated desires and needs vary greatly. This design ensures the film remains visually simplistic and abstract while conveying profound and layered content. A critical element in the film is a music box that descends from above, serving as a symbol of temptation. It not only sparks disputes and conflicts among the characters but ultimately leads to the complete collapse of the balanced state. The allure of the music box represents humanity's fragile resistance to desires and how such temptations, under extreme conditions, can easily dismantle harmony and balance. Through this dramatic setup, the film exposes crises in human nature and morality, illustrating how human rationality and ethics often appear weak and vulnerable when faced with temptation.

The loss of balance in the film's climax not only drives the narrative but also symbolizes deeper societal and psychological issues. It reflects real-life moral dilemmas, particularly in modern society, as people struggle to find a balance between temptations and moral norms. By vividly portraying these conflicts, the film provokes deep reflection on human nature and morality, prompting viewers to ponder how to uphold moral integrity in real life and maintain inner balance within a complex and ever-changing social environment.

4.2 Cultural Integration in Best International Films

Over the years, films that win the Oscar for Best International Feature often present unique perspectives and expressions of different cultures, while also reflecting cultural integration and conflict in the context of globalization. Parasite and Roma are two quintessential examples. These films not only showcase the distinctive characteristics of their respective cultures but also delve into the complexities of cultural integration through profound social observations and portrayals of human nature.

Fig. 4. *Parasite* and *Roma*

The film *Parasite* successfully illustrates the stark disparity between the rich and poor in South Korean society and the sharpness of class conflict through its vivid cinematography and compelling plot design. It skillfully reveals the prevalent issues of cultural conflict and inequality in modern society, provoking audiences to reflect on these problems. The film tells the story of a family living at the bottom of society, yearning to escape poverty and enter the upper class, and how this misalignment in social hierarchy leads to extreme cultural clashes and contradictions. The meticulous depiction of class division not only vividly reflects the reality of South Korean society but also reveals the widespread phenomenon of social inequality in the context of globalization. This profound exploration of cultural conflict prompts viewers to consider how to address and resolve social inequality amidst globalization and how to achieve harmonious coexistence between different cultures and social classes.

Through a series of carefully crafted plots and characters, the film showcases the struggles and efforts

of the members of the underprivileged family under social pressure. They attempt to improve their living conditions through various means, including deception and exploitation. However, as the story unfolds, viewers gradually realize the tragedy and helplessness hidden behind these efforts. The characters in the film are not merely individual symbols but also epitomize entire social classes. Their destinies reflect the injustice of the social structure and the helplessness of individuals within it. The climax of the film, through a meticulously planned party, pushes the contradictions between different social classes to the extreme. This party not only showcases the luxury and indifference of the upper class but also reveals the anger and despair of the underprivileged people in the face of social injustice. Through this strong contrast, the film deeply impresses upon the audience the harsh reality of social inequality.

Parasite is not just a film about South Korean society; it is also a profound reflection on the issue of social inequality that exists universally in the context of globalization. The film calls on the audience to pay attention to and think about how to find balance among different cultures and social classes, how to pursue personal happiness while also contributing to social fairness and harmony. Through this deep social critique and humanistic care, *Parasite* has become one of the most influential and thought-provoking films in recent years.

Meanwhile, the film *Roma*, with its delicate brushstrokes, deeply portrays the complexity of family relationships and the subtle process of societal change in Mexican society. This film profoundly showcases the diversity and complexity presented by Mexican society in the context of cultural integration. The family's social environment not only vividly reflects Mexico's experiences during its process of social transformation but also meticulously presents the profound impact brought about by cultural integration. Through intricate depictions of the relationships among family members and societal change, the film reveals how people struggle to find balance between tradition and modernity, individual and society during the process of cultural integration. The film not only showcases Mexico's cultural characteristics but also provides profound insights into cultural integration in the context of globalization, helping us understand the collision and fusion of different cultures more deeply.

Roma, through its unique narrative approach, immerses viewers in an emotional and historical Mexican family. In this family, we can see the entanglement of love and hate among its members and feel their struggles and perseverance during societal turbulence. The film cleverly captures the trivialities of family members' daily lives, and through these details, showcases the societal changes and the complexity of cultural integration in Mexico. Each scene, each dialogue in the film, is filled with symbolic meaning, allowing viewers to deeply understand the profound impact of cultural integration while experiencing the story.

This film is not merely about family and society; it is also a deep analysis of cultural collision and integration. Through the perspective of family members, the film depicts Mexicans' confusion and struggles amidst the tide of globalization and also showcases their arduous process of seeking self-identity between tradition and modernity. Each character in the film represents a group in Mexican society, and their stories converge to form a diverse and complex social tableau. Through these vivid stories, the film allows us to deeply understand the complexity and diversity of cultural integration in the context of globalization.

These films, through specific cultural backgrounds and social issues, demonstrate the diversity and complexity of cultural integration in the context of globalization. They not only excel in artistic expression but also provide profound insights into society and humanity. Through the analysis of these films, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic process of cultural integration and its manifestation in the real world.

V. Thematic significance

5.1 *Balance* and the thematic reflections of other Oscar-winning films

The animated short *Balance* and other Oscar winners for Best International Film demonstrate signifi-

cant common themes in their exploration of culture and humanity. Both utilize profound narrative techniques and symbolism to deeply investigate issues of cultural integration and the equilibrium of humanity in modern society. Specifically, *Balance*, through minimalist visual symbols and stark emotional contrasts, reveals human desires and conflicts, along with their disruptive impact on social balance. This setup not only expresses individual inner struggles but also serves as a metaphor for how temptations and conflicts in the real world affect societal stability.

In contrast, the Best International Films from the Oscars explore cultural conflicts and integration through complex narrative structures and rich cultural backgrounds. For instance, *Parasite* and *Roma* vividly portray cultural differences and class issues, showcasing cultural conflicts and integrations during globalization through specific cultural contexts. Though their forms of expression differ, these films all aim to delve into the complexities of cultural integration and human equilibrium through artistic representation. Both evoke the audience's contemplation of human and cultural challenges in modern society with their nuanced storytelling and symbolism.

Additionally, films like *Children of Heaven* depict the tension between cultural traditions and modern life through the portrayal of everyday life in an Iranian family. In this film, a lost pair of shoes becomes a symbol reflecting the struggle between poverty and hope, as well as the deep bond between family members. Meanwhile, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* examines the intricate relationships between love, memory, and identity through a story of memory loss, highlighting individual struggles in modern society as they search for belonging.

These films exhibit diversity not only in their visuals and storytelling but also in their in-depth explorations of the multifaceted nature of humanity and the diversity of cultures. By presenting different cultural contexts and character destinies, they uncover shared human emotions and experiences, as well as the mutual influences and integrations between cultures in the context of globalization. Through these works, audiences can gain a deeper understanding of the differences and commonalities between various cultures, as well as how to find a balance of humanity amidst cultural integration in modern society.

5.2 Comparison of artistic techniques

In terms of artistic expression, the film *Balance* employs a surrealistic style, using minimalist visual effects and strong symbolism to profoundly reveal the desires and conflicts within human nature. The film predominantly uses gray-white tones, which not only symbolize the characters' emotional indifference but also reflect the complexity and coldness of society. This minimalist visual style enables viewers to focus more intensely on the characters' inner struggles and moral conflicts, making every element in the film rich in meaning and symbolism.

Meanwhile, Best International Films often adopt diverse narrative techniques and rich visual elements to showcase the complexities of cultural integration. For example, *Parasite* utilizes contrasting visual styles and intricate cinematography to expose social inequality and the complexity of human nature. The film's use of visual language and color highlights the contrast between social classes, while its sophisticated narrative structure conveys characters' inner conflicts and societal contradictions. This meticulous storytelling and visual representation give the film deeper layers of meaning.

Similarly, *Roma* employs delicate cinematography and immersive narrative techniques to depict family relationships and societal changes in Mexican society. Every frame in the film is imbued with emotion and symbolism, allowing viewers to deeply understand and connect with the themes and emotions the film conveys. These films, through their diverse artistic techniques, not only deepen the exploration of cultural integration and societal changes but also enable audiences to comprehensively and profoundly grasp the essence the films aim to express.

5.3 Reflection of Social Issues

The short film *Balance*, with its unique artistic expression and profound themes, successfully portrays various cultural and human issues in modern society on screen, holding significant social implications. The work cleverly utilizes the music box, a symbolic prop, to deeply explore the desires and conflicts within human nature, thereby reflecting the moral crises and dilemmas of humanity prevalent in real-life society. The allure of the music box plays a pivotal role in the film, symbolizing human vulnerability when faced with desires and the gradual collapse of social moral systems. This symbolic approach lends the film a stronger sense of realism and intellectual depth in its exploration of humanity and social issues.

Meanwhile, Oscar-winning Best International Films often use their rich and complex narrative structures and diverse cultural backgrounds to showcase the complexities and diversity of cultural integration. For example, *Parasite* vividly depicts the gap between rich and poor and the antagonism between social classes, profoundly exposing the exacerbation of social inequality in the context of globalization. Similarly, *Roma*, through its delicate depiction of family and societal relationships, highlights the complexity and diversity of cultural integration. These films provoke viewers to deeply contemplate cultural conflicts and integration during the globalization process by exploring cultural and social issues.

In conclusion, both *Balance* and Oscar-winning Best International Films, through their unique artistic styles and narrative techniques, deeply reflect cultural and human issues in modern society. By employing contrast and integration, they not only provide audiences with an artistic experience but also encourage them to reflect on the complexities of society and humanity. Despite their differences in artistic expression, these two types of films demonstrate similar depth and breadth in exploring social issues and the essence of humanity, offering viewers rich opportunities for thought.

VI. The balance of globalization in cinema

6.1 The Importance of Cultural Integration and Balance

In the context of globalization, cultural integration and human balance have become two key themes in the development of modern society. Cultural integration refers to the mutual influence and blending of different cultures, which not only promotes cultural diversity and innovation but also drives societal progress and development. Through cultural integration, cultures can learn from each other, creating new cultural forms and artistic expressions. This cross-cultural exchange and fusion bring rich social and cultural outcomes.

However, the process of cultural integration inevitably leads to certain issues, such as cultural conflicts and loss. Contact between different cultures can result in clashes, triggering crises of cultural identity and societal frictions. Furthermore, the integration of cultures in the context of globalization may marginalize and even lead to the disappearance of certain cultures. To address these challenges, countries and societies need to establish effective cultural policies and social mechanisms that protect and inherit local cultures while promoting mutual respect and understanding among different cultures. Effective cultural policies can help maintain balance in cultural integration, preventing cultural uniformity and homogenization, and ensuring the preservation of cultural diversity and innovation.

Human balance, on the other hand, involves individual and societal harmony and stability. Balance is not only the foundation for societal stability but also the key to personal happiness and growth. Individuals often face various desires and temptations in life that can disrupt inner balance and affect societal stability. Therefore, both individuals and societies need to seek balance in constantly changing environments to maintain harmony and stability. Societal structural balance and equitable resource distribution are crucial for achieving societal balance, while psychological health and moral norms are fundamental to personal balance.

In the pursuit of human balance, attention must be paid to individual mental health and moral norms. Mental health refers to an individual's harmonious state of cognition, emotions, and behavior, enabling them to cope with life's stress and challenges while maintaining inner balance. Moral norms refer to the behavioral guidelines and values individuals should adhere to in social life, helping them build healthy interpersonal rela-

tionships and uphold societal harmony and stability. To achieve human balance, focus on individual mental health and moral norms is necessary, assisting individuals in maintaining inner balance and achieving personal happiness and growth in changing environments.

Overall, in the context of globalization, cultural integration and human balance are two key themes in modern societal development. Balance must be sought in cultural integration, protecting and inheriting local cultures while promoting mutual respect and understanding among different cultures. Additionally, attention must be given to individual mental health and moral norms to help individuals maintain inner balance and achieve personal happiness and growth in changing environments. Only in this way can societal harmony and stability be achieved, driving societal progress and development.

6.2 Insights from Oscar-Winning Films

Oscar-winning films, with their profound artistic expression and delicate narrative style, provoke deep reflections on cultural and human issues. These films use unique artistic styles and powerful symbolism to unveil the problems of cultural integration and human balance in modern society, offering new perspectives and solutions. For instance, the Oscar-winning animated short *Balance* explores the desires and conflicts within human nature and their impact on societal balance through minimalist visuals and symbolism. The symbolic elements in the film, such as the music box, reflect humanity's vulnerability when facing temptation and the moral crises it encounters. This artistic approach provides profound insights into human and moral issues in modern society.

Other award-winning films, such as *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, *Parasite*, and *Roma*, also showcase the complexities and diversity of cultural integration through their unique narratives and visual styles. *Everything Everywhere All at Once* interprets the essence of love and inclusion through characters' inner resolutions and family relationships. *Parasite* reveals the social inequality and cultural conflict in the context of globalization through its depiction of social classes. Meanwhile, *Roma* portrays the challenges and opportunities in cultural integration through intricate depictions of family and societal relationships. These films, grounded in specific cultural contexts and profound social observations, provide unique insights into the issues of cultural integration and human balance in modern society.

By analyzing these Oscar-winning films, we can better understand the issues of cultural integration and human balance in contemporary society. These films not only hold great artistic value but also uncover complex cultural and human challenges in modern society through delicate narratives and profound symbolism. They offer new perspectives and solutions, encouraging us to rethink how to achieve cultural harmony and balance in the process of globalization and how to address the challenges within human nature.

VII. Artistic Value and Socio-Culture

7.1 Artistry and Impact

The Oscar-winning animated short *Balance* and numerous Best International Film winners aim to unveil the unique artistic value and social significance of these films in showcasing cultural integration and human balance. Through a detailed analysis of Balance, we find that the film utilizes minimalist visual symbols and strong emotional contrasts to deeply explore desires and conflicts within human nature, as well as reflecting moral crises in real society. Its minimalist artistic style and symbolic techniques successfully present complex societal issues in an intuitive way, enabling viewers to profoundly understand the complexity of human nature and the fragility of societal balance.

In the process of comparative analysis, we observe that many Best International Film winners employ intricate narrative structures and rich cultural backgrounds to vividly portray the conflicts and integration within cultural blending. These films not only showcase the uniqueness of their respective cultures but also, through a deep exploration of social issues, inspire viewers to reflect on cultural conflicts and social inequality

in the context of globalization. They utilize diverse artistic techniques to deepen the understanding of cultural integration and human balance, providing viewers with new perspectives and opportunities for reflection.

Overall, *Balance* and other award-winning films, through their unique artistic styles and narrative techniques, offer profound insights into the complex cultural and human issues of modern society. These films not only hold high artistic value but also play an important role in advancing discussions on cultural integration and human balance. They provide viewers with visual and emotional enjoyment while leaving a lasting impact on intellectual and cultural levels. Through these films, we can glimpse the interplay between different cultures and the place and role of individuals within the broader societal tide, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity and complexity of human society.

7.2 Overcoming Limitations

The detailed analysis of *Balance* and several Oscar-winning films thoroughly explores the artistic expression and narrative elements of these works, yet certain limitations exist within the scope of the research. Firstly, the study primarily focuses on an in-depth analysis of a limited number of films, which may lead to an insufficient sample size, potentially lacking comprehensive coverage when discussing cultural integration and human equilibrium. Secondly, the perspective of the study is relatively singular, emphasizing the artistic expression and narrative content of the films while inadequately considering audience reception and the societal impact of these works. Additionally, the research methodology shows certain constraints, relying mainly on textual analysis and theoretical extrapolation without support from empirical studies.

Looking ahead, future research could consider expanding the sample size by including more Oscar-winning films to explore cultural integration and human equilibrium in greater depth. For instance, studying other award-winning animated shorts and international films could provide broader perspectives and more robust data support. Furthermore, future research might adopt empirical research methods, conducting surveys and analyzing the actual impact of films on audiences to verify the reflection and influence of cultural and human topics presented in the films within real-world society. This approach would help achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the contributions of films in promoting cultural integration and human equilibrium and provide richer data support and theoretical foundations for subsequent studies.

In summary, the findings of this research not only provide valuable insights into cultural and human topics in Oscar-winning films but also lay a solid foundation for future research directions. Through ongoing, in-depth studies, we can hope to more fully uncover the complexities of cultural integration and human equilibrium, thereby advancing the progress of relevant academic fields and the development of social practices. Future research could further broaden to include different types of films, including independent productions and commercial blockbusters, to obtain more comprehensive analytical results. Additionally, incorporating interdisciplinary research methods, such as sociology, psychology, and cultural studies, would help delve into the effects of films on audiences and society from multiple perspectives. These efforts would not only deepen our understanding of the intrinsic value of films but also better evaluate their actual role in fostering cultural understanding and human development.

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